

Ailsa Paige by Robert W. Chambers

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Produced by Al Haines

AILSAS PAIGE

A NOVEL

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

"It is at best but a mixture of a little good
with much evil and a little pleasure with much
pain; the beautiful is linked with the revolting,
the trivial with the solemn, bathos with
pathos, the commonplace with the sublime."

ILLUSTRATED

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TO THE CONQUERORS

WHO WON IMMORTAL VICTORY

"Arm yourselves and be Valiant Men, and see that ye rise up
in readiness against the Dawn, that ye may do Battle with These
that are Assembled against us. . . .

"For it is better to die in Battle than live to behold the
Calamities of our own People. . . ."

"Lord, we took not the Land into Possession by our own Swords;
neither was it our own Hands that helped us; but Thy Hand was
a Buckler; and Thy right Arm a Shield, and the Light of Thy
Countenance hath conquered forever."

AND TO THE VANQUISHED
WHO WON IMMORTALITY

"We are the fallen, who, with helpless faces
Low in the dust, in stiffening ruin lay,
Felt the hoofs beat, and heard the rattling traces
As o'er us drove the chariots of the fray.

"We are the fallen, who by ramparts gory,
Awaiting death, heard the far shouts begin,
And with our last glance glimpsed the victor's glory
For which we died, but dying might not win.

"We were but men. Always our eyes were holden,
We could not read the dark that walled us round,
Nor deem our futile plans with Thine enfolden--
We fought, not knowing God was on the ground.

"Aye, grant our ears to bear the foolish praising
Of men--old voices of our lost home-land,

Or else, the gateways of this dim world, raising,
Give us our swords again, and hold Thy hand."

--W. H. WOODS.

PREFACE

Among the fifty-eight regiments of Zouaves and the seven regiments of Lancers enlisted in the service of the United States between 1861 and 1865 it will be useless for the reader to look for any record of the 3d Zouaves or of the 8th Lancers. The red breeches and red fezzes of the Zouaves clothed many a dead man on Southern battle-fields; the scarlet swallow-tailed pennon of the Lancers fluttered from many a lance-tip beyond the Potomac; the histories of these sixty-five regiments are known. But no history of the 3d Zouaves or of the 8th Lancers has ever been written save in this narrative; and historians and veterans would seek in vain for any records of these two regiments--regiments which might have been, but never were.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"It is there, in you--all that I believed"

"What an insolently reckless head it was!"

"I won it fairly, and I'm going to stake it all on one last bet"

"Is Ormond your name?"

"_Must_ you go so soon? So soon?"

"He dismounted and clutched the senseless carbineer"

"She dropped on her knees at his bedside and hid her face
on his hands"

"Phillip--Phillip--my lover, my country, my God--worshipped
and adored of men!"

AILSA PAIGE

CHAPTER I

The butler made an instinctive movement to detain him, but he flung him aside and entered the drawing-room, the servant recovering his equilibrium and following on a run. Light from great crystal chandeliers dazzled him for a moment; the butler again confronted

him but hesitated under the wicked glare from his eyes. Then through the brilliant vista, the young fellow caught a glimpse of a dining-room, a table where silver and crystal glimmered, and a great gray man just lowering a glass of wine from his lips to gaze at him with quiet curiosity.

The next moment he traversed the carpeted interval between them and halted at the table's damask edge, gazing intently across at the solitary diner, who sat leaning back in an arm-chair, heavy right hand still resting on the stem of a claret glass, a cigar suspended between the fingers of his left hand.

"Are you Colonel Arran?"

"I am," replied the man at the table coolly. "Who the devil are you?"

"By God," replied the other with an insolent laugh, "that's what I came here to find out!"

The man at the table laid both hands on the edge of the cloth and partly rose from his chair, then fell back solidly, in silence, but his intent gaze never left the other's bloodless face.

"Send away your servants, Colonel Arran!" said the young man in a

voice now labouring under restraint. "We'll settle this matter now."

The other made as though to speak twice; then, with an effort, he motioned to the butler.

What he meant by the gesture perhaps he himself scarcely realised at the moment.

The butler instantly signalled to Pim, the servant behind Colonel Arran's chair, and started forward with a furtive glance at his master; and the young man turned disdainfully to confront him.

"Will you retire peaceably, sir?"

"No, but you will retire permanently if you touch me. Be very careful."

Colonel Arran leaned forward, hands still gripping the table's edge:

"Larraway!"

"Sir?"

"You may go."

The small gray eyes in the pock-pitted face stole toward young Berkley, then were cautiously lowered.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"Close the drawing-room doors. No--this way. Go out through the pantry. And take Pim with you."

"Very well, sir."

"And, Larraway!"

"Sir?"

"When I want you I'll ring. Until then I don't want anybody or anything. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is all."

"Thank you, sir."

The great mahogany folding doors slid smoothly together, closing out the brilliant drawing-room; the door of the butler's pantry clicked.

Colonel Arran slowly wheeled in his place and surveyed his unbidden guest:

"Well, sir," he said, "continue."

"I haven't yet begun."

"You are mistaken, Berkley; you have made a very significant beginning. I was told that you are this kind of a young man."

"I am this kind of a young man. What else have you been told?"

Colonel Arran inspected him through partly closed and heavy eyes;

"I am further informed," he said, "that at twenty-four you have already managed to attain bankruptcy."

"Perfectly correct. What other items have you collected concerning me?"

"You can retrace your own peregrinations if you care to. I believe they follow a vicious circle bisecting the semi-fashionable world, and the--other. Shall we say that the expression, unenviable notoriety, summarises the reputation you have acquired?"

"Exactly," he said; "both kinds of vice, Colonel Arran--respectable and disreputable."

"Oh! And am I correct in concluding that, at this hour, you stand there a financially ruined man--at twenty-four years of age----"

"I do stand here; but I'm going to sit down."

He did so, dropped both elbows on the cloth, and balancing his chin on the knuckles of his clasped hands, examined the older man with insolent, unchanging gaze.

"Go on," he said coolly, "what else do you conclude me to be?"

"What else is there to say to you, Berkley? You have evidently seen my attorneys."

"I have; the fat shyster and the bow-legged one." He reached over, poured himself a glass of brandy from a decanter, then, with an unpleasant laugh, set it aside untasted.

"I beg your pardon. I've had a hard day of it. I'm not myself," he said with an insolent shrug of excuse. "At eleven o'clock this morning Illinois Central had fallen three more points, and I had no further interest in the market. Then one of your brokers--" He leaned farther forward on the table and stared brightly at the older man, showing an edge of even teeth, under the receding upper lip:

"How long have your people been watching me?"

"Long enough to give me what information I required."

"Then you really _have_ had me watched?"

"I have chosen to keep in touch with your--career, Berkley."

Berkley's upper lip again twitched unpleasantly; but, when at length he spoke, he spoke more calmly than before and his mobile features were in pallid repose.

"One of your brokers--Cone--stopped me. I was too confused to understand what he wanted of me. I went with him to your attorneys--" Like lightning the snarl twitched his mouth again; he made as though to rise, and controlled himself in the act.

"Where are the originals of those letters?" he managed to say at last.

"In this house."

"Am I to have them?"

"I think so."

"So do I," said the young man with a ghastly smile. "I'm quite sure of it."

Colonel Arran regarded him in surprise.

"There is no occasion for violence in this house, Berkley."

"Where are the letters?"

"Have you any doubts concerning what my attorneys have told you?

The originals are at your immediate disposal if you wish."

Then Berkley struck the table fiercely, and stood up, as claret splashed and trembling crystal rang.

"That's all I want of you!" he said. "Do you understand what you've done? You've killed the last shred of self-respect in me! Do you think I'd take anything at your hands? I never cared for anybody in the world except my mother. If what your lawyers tell me is true--" His voice choked; he stood swaying a moment, face covered by his hands,

"Berkley!"

The young man's hands fell; he faced the other, who had risen to his heavy six-foot height, confronting him across the table.

"Berkley, whatever claim you have on me--and I'm ignoring the chance that you have none----"

"By God, I tell you I have none! I want none! What you have done to her you have done to me! What you and your conscience and your

cruelty and your attorneys did to her twenty-four years ago, you have done this day to me! As surely as you outlawed her, so have you outlawed me to-day. That is what I now am, an outlaw!"

"It was insulted civilisation that punished, not I, Berkley----"

"It was you! You took your shrinking pound of flesh. I know your sort. Hell is full of them singing psalms!"

Colonel Arran sat silently stern a moment. Then the congested muscles, habituated to control, relaxed again. He said, under perfect self-command:

"You'd better know the truth. It is too late now to discuss whose fault it was that the trouble arose between your mother and me. We lived together only a few weeks. She was in love with her cousin; she didn't realise it until she'd married me. I have nothing more to say on that score; she tried to be faithful, I believe she was; but he was a scoundrel. And she ended by thinking me one.

"Even before I married her I was made painfully aware that our dispositions and temperaments were not entirely compatible. I think," he added grimly, "that in the letters read to you this afternoon she used the expression, 'ice and fire,' in referring to herself and me."

Berkley only looked at him.

"There is now nothing to be gained in reviewing that unhappy affair," continued the other. "Your mother's family are headlong, impulsive, fiery, unstable, emotional. There was a last shameful and degrading scene. I offered her a separation; but she was unwisely persuaded to sue for divorce."

Colonel Arran bent his head and touched his long gray moustache with bony fingers.

"The proceeding was farcical; the decree a fraud. I warned her; but she snapped her fingers at me and married her cousin the next day. . . . And then I did my duty by civilisation."

Still Berkley never stirred. The older man looked down at the wine-soiled cloth, traced the outline of the crimson stain with unsteady finger. Then, lifting his head:

"I had that infamous decree set aside," he said grimly. "It was a matter of duty and of conscience, and I did it without remorse. . . . They were on what they supposed to be a wedding trip. But I had warned her." He shrugged his massive shoulders. "If they were not over-particular they were probably happy. Then he broke

his neck hunting--before you were born."

"Was he my father?"

"I am taking the chance that he was not."

"You had reason to believe----"

"I thought so. But--your mother remained silent. And her answer to my letters was to have you christened under the name you bear to-day, Philip Ormond Berkley. And then, to force matters, I made her status clear to her. Maybe--I don't know--but my punishment of her may have driven her to a hatred of me--a desperation that accepted everything--even _you_!"

Berkley lifted a countenance from which every vestige of colour had fled.

"Why did you tell me this?"

"Because I believe that there is every chance--that you may be legally entitled to my name. Since I have known who you are, I--I _have_ had you watched. I have hesitated--a long while. My brokers have watched you for a year, now; my attorneys for much

longer. To-day you stand in need of me, if ever you have stood in need of anybody. I take the chance that you have that claim on me; I offer to receive you, provide for you. That is all, Berkley. Now you know everything."

"Who else--knows?"

"Knows what?"

"Knows what you did to my mother?"

"Some people among the families immediately concerned," replied Colonel Arran coolly.

"Who are they?"

"Your mother's relatives, the Paiges, the Berkleys--my family, the Arrans, the Lents----"

"What Lents?" interrupted the young man looking up sharply.

"They live in Brooklyn. There's a brother and a sister, orphans; and an uncle. Captain Josiah Lent."

"Oh. . . . Who else?"

"A Mrs. Craig who lives in Brooklyn. She was Celia Paige, your mother's maid of honour."

"Who else?"

"A sister-in-law of Mrs. Craig, formerly my ward. She is now a widow, a Mrs. Paige, living on London Terrace. She, however, has no knowledge of the matter in question; nor have the Lents, nor any one in the Craig family except Mrs. Craig."

"Who else?"

"Nobody."

"I see. . . . And, as I understand it, you are now stepping forward to offer me--on the chance of--of----"

"I offer you a place in this house as my son. I offer to deal with you as a father--accepting that belief and every responsibility, and every duty, and every sacrifice that such a belief entails,"

For a long time the young fellow stood there without stirring, pallid, his dark, expressionless eyes, fixed on space. And after a while he spoke.

"Colonel Arran, I had rather than all the happiness on earth, that you had left me the memory of my mother. You have chosen not to do so. And now, do you think I am likely to exchange what she and I really are, for anything more respectable that you believe you can offer?"

"How, under God, you could have punished her as you did--how you could have reconciled your conscience to the invocation of a brutal law which rehabilitated you at the expense of the woman who had been your wife--how you could have done this in the name of duty and of conscience, I can not comprehend.

"I do not believe that one drop of your blood runs in my veins."

He bent forward, laying his hands flat on the cloth, then gripping it fiercely in clenched fists:

"All I want of you is what was my mother's. I bear the name she gave me; it pleased her to bestow it; it is good enough for me to wear. If it be hers only, or if it was also my father's, I do not know; but that name, legitimate or otherwise, is not for exchange!"

I will keep it, Colonel Arran. I am what I am."

He hesitated, rigid, clenching and unclenching his hands--then drew a deep, agonised breath:

"I suppose you have meant to be just to me, I wish you might have dealt more mercifully with my mother. As for what you have done to me--well--if she was illegally my mother, I had rather be her illegitimate son than the son of any woman who ever lived within the law. Now may I have her letters?"

"Is that your decision, Berkley?"

"It is. I want only her letters from you--and any little keepsakes--relics--if there be any----"

"I offer to recognise you as my son."

"I decline--believing that you mean to be just--and perhaps kind--God knows what you do mean by disinterring the dead for a son to look back upon----"

"Could I have offered you what I offer, otherwise?"

"Man! Man! _You_ have nothing to offer _me_! Your silence was the only kindness you could have done me! You have killed something in me. I don't know what, yet--but I think it was the best part of me."

"Berkley, do you suppose that I have entered upon this matter lightly?"

Berkley laughed, showing his teeth. "No. It was your damned conscience; and I suppose you couldn't strangle it. I am sorry you couldn't. Sometimes a strangled conscience makes men kinder."

Colonel Arran rang. A dark flush had overspread his forehead; he turned to the butler.

"Bring me the despatch box which stands on: my study table."

Berkley, hands behind his back, was pacing the dining-room carpet.

"Would you accept a glass of wine?" asked Colonel Arran in a low voice.

Berkley wheeled on him with a terrible smile.

"Shall a man drink wine with the slayer of souls?" Then, pallid face horribly distorted, he stretched out a shaking arm. "Not that you ever could succeed in getting near enough to murder _hers_! But you've killed mine. I know now what died in me. It was that! . . . And I know now, as I stand here excommunicated by you from all who have been born within the law, that there is not left alive in me one ideal, one noble impulse, one spiritual conviction. I am what your righteousness has made me--a man without hope; a man with nothing alive in him except the physical brute. . . . Better not arouse that."

"You do not know what you are saying, Berkley"--Colonel Arran choked; turned gray; then a spasm twitched his features and he grasped the arms of his chair, staring at Berkley with burning eyes.

Neither spoke again until Larraway entered, carrying an inlaid box.

"Thank you, Larraway. You need not wait."

"Thank _you_, sir."

When they were again alone Colonel Arran unlocked and opened the box, and, behind the raised lid, remained invisibly busy for some little time, apparently sorting and re-sorting the hidden contents.

He was so very long about it that Berkley stirred at last in his chair; and at the same moment the older man seemed to arrive at an abrupt decision, for he closed the lid and laid two packages on the cloth between them.

"Are these mine?" asked Berkley.

"They are mine," corrected the other quietly, "but I choose to yield them to you."

"Thank you," said Berkley. There was a hint of ferocity in his voice. He took the letters, turned around to look for his hat, found it, and straightened up with a long, deep intake of breath.

"I think there is nothing more to be said between us, Colonel Arran?"

"That lies with you."

Berkley passed a steady hand across his eyes. "Then, sir, there remain the ceremonies of my leave taking--" he stepped closer, level-eyed--"and my very bitter hatred."

There was a pause. Colonel Arran waited a moment, then struck the

bell:

"Larraway, Mr. Berkley has decided to go."

"Yes, sir."

"You will accompany Mr. Berkley to the door."

"Yes, sir."

"And hand to Mr. Berkley the outer key of this house."

"Yes, sir."

"And in case Mr. Berkley ever again desires to enter this house, he is to be admitted, and his orders are to be obeyed by every servant in it."

"Yes, sir."

Colonel Arran rose trembling. He and Berkley looked at each other; then both bowed; and the butler ushered out the younger man.

"Pardon--the latch-key, sir."

Berkley took it, examined it, handed it back.

"Return it to Colonel Arran with Mr. Berkley's undying--compliments," he said, and went blindly out into the April night, but his senses were swimming as though he were drunk.

Behind him the door of the house of Arran clanged.

Larraway stood stealthily peering through the side-lights; then tiptoed toward the hallway and entered the dining-room with velvet tread.

"Port or brandy, sir?" he whispered at Colonel Arran's elbow.

The Colonel shook his head.

"Nothing more. Take that box to my study."

Later, seated at his study table before the open box, he heard Larraway knock; and he quietly laid away the miniature of Berkley's mother which had been lying in his steady palm for hours.

"Well?"

"Pardon. Mr. Berkley's key, with Mr. Berkley's compliments, sir."

And he laid it upon the table by the box.

"Thank you. That will be all."

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

"Good night."

The Colonel picked up the evening paper and opened it mechanically:

"By telegraph!" he read, "War inevitable. Postscript! Fort Sumter! It is now certain that the Government has decided to reinforce Major Andersen's command at all hazards----"

The lines in the Evening Post blurred under his eyes; he passed one broad, bony hand across them, straightened his shoulders, and, setting the unlighted cigar firmly between his teeth, composed himself to read. But after a few minutes he had read enough. He dropped deeper into his arm-chair, groping for the miniature of Berkley's mother.

As for Berkley, he was at last alone with his letters and his keepsakes, in the lodgings which he inhabited--and now would inhabit no more. The letters lay still unopened before him on his writing table; he stood looking at the miniatures and photographs, all portraits of his mother, from girlhood onward.

One by one he took them up, examined them--touched them to his lips, laid each away. The letters he also laid away unopened; he could not bear to read them now.

The French clock in his bedroom struck eight. He closed and locked his desk, stood looking at it blankly for a moment; then he squared his shoulders. An envelope lay open on the desk beside him.

"Oh--yes," he said aloud, but scarcely heard his own voice.

The envelope enclosed an invitation from one, Camilla Lent, to a theatre party for that evening, and a dance afterward.

He had a vague idea that he had accepted.

The play was "The Seven Sisters" at Laura, Keene's Theatre. The dance was somewhere--probably at Delmonico's. If he were going, it

was time he was afoot.

His eyes wandered from one familiar object to another; he moved restlessly, and began to roam through the richly furnished rooms. But to Berkley nothing in the world seemed familiar any longer; and the strangeness of it, and the solitude were stupefying him.

When he became tired trying to think, he made the tour again in a stupid sort of way, then rang for his servant, Burgess, and started mechanically about his dressing.

Nothing any longer seemed real, not even pain.

He rang for Burgess again, but the fellow did not appear. So he dressed without aid. And at last he was ready; and went out, drunk with fatigue and the reaction from pain.

He did not afterward remember how he came to the theatre. Presently he found himself in a lower tier box, talking to a Mrs. Paige who, curiously, miraculously, resembled the girlish portraits of his mother--or he imagined so--until he noticed that her hair was yellow and her eyes blue. And he laughed crazily to himself, inwardly convulsed; and then his own voice sounded again, low, humorous, caressingly modulated; and he listened to it, amused that he was able to speak at all.

"And so you are the wonderful Ailsa Paige," he heard himself repeating. "Camilla wrote me that I must beware of my peace of mind the moment I first set eyes on you----"

"Camilla Lent is supremely silly, Mr. Berkley----"

"Camilla is a sibyl. This night my peace of mind departed for ever."

"May I offer you a little of mine?"

"I may ask more than that of you?"

"You mean a dance?"

"More than one."

"How many?"

"All of them. How many will you give me?"

"One. Please look at the stage. Isn't Laura Keene bewitching?"

"Your voice is."

"Such nonsense. Besides, I'd rather hear what Laura Keene is saying than listen to you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Incredible as it may sound, Mr. Berkley, I really do."

He dropped back in the box. Camilla laid her painted fan across his arm.

"Isn't Ailsa Paige the most enchanting creature you ever saw? I told you so! _Isn't_ she?"

"Except one. I was looking at some pictures of her a half an hour ago."

"She must be very beautiful," sighed Camilla.

"She was."

"Oh. . . . Is she dead?"

"Murdered."

Camilla looked at the stage in horrified silence. Later she touched him again on the arm, timidly.

"Are you not well, Mr. Berkley?"

"Perfectly. Why?"

"You are so pale. Do look at Ailsa Paige. I am completely enamoured of her. Did you ever see such a lovely creature in all your life? And she is very young but very wise. She knows useful and charitable things--like nursing the sick, and dressing injuries, and her own hats. And she actually served a whole year in the horrible city hospital! Wasn't it brave of her!"

Berkley swayed forward to look at Ailsa Paige. He began to be tormented again by the feverish idea that she resembled the girl pictures of his mother. Nor could he rid himself of the fantastic impression. In the growing unreality of it all, in the distorted outlines of a world gone topsy-turvy, amid the deadly blurr of things material and mental, Ailsa Paige's face alone remained

strangely clear. And, scarcely knowing what he was saying, he leaned forward to her shoulder again.

"There was only one other like you," he said. Mrs. Paige turned slowly and looked at him, but the quiet rebuke in her eyes remained unuttered.

"Be more genuine with me," she said gently. "I am worth it, Mr. Berkley."

Then, suddenly there seemed to run a pale flash through his brain,

"Yes," he said in an altered voice, "you are worth it. . . . Don't drive me away from you just yet."

"Drive you away?" in soft concern. "I did not mean----"

"You will, some day. But don't do it to-night." Then the quick, feverish smile broke out.

"Do you need a servant? I'm out of a place. I can either cook, clean silver, open the door, wash sidewalks, or wait on the table; so you see I have every qualification."

Smilingly perplexed, she let her eyes rest on his pallid face for a moment, then turned toward the stage again.

The "Seven Sisters" pursued its spectacular course; lone Burke, Polly Marshall, and Mrs. Vining were in the cast; tableau succeeded tableau; "I wish I were in Dixie," was sung, and the popular burlesque ended in the celebrated scene, "The Birth of the Butterfly in the Bower of Ferns," with the entire company kissing their finger-tips to a vociferous and satiated audience.

Then it was supper at Delmonico's, and a dance--and at last the waltz promised him by Ailsa Paige.

Through the fixed unreality of things he saw her clearly, standing, awaiting him, saw her sensitive face as she quietly laid her hand on his--saw it suddenly alter as the light contact startled both.

Flushed, she looked up at him like a hurt child, conscious yet only of the surprise.

Dazed, he stared back. Neither spoke; his arm encircled her; both seemed aware of that; then only of the swaying rhythm of the dance, and of joined hands, and her waist imprisoned. Only the fragrance of her hair seemed real to him; and the long lashes resting on curved cheeks, and the youth of her yielding to his embrace.

Neither spoke when it had ended. She turned aside and stood motionless a moment, resting against the stair rail as though to steady herself. Her small head was lowered.

He managed to say: "You will give me the next?"

"No."

"Then the next----"

"No," she said, not moving.

A young fellow came up eagerly, cocksure of her, but she shook her head--and shook her head to all--and Berkley remained standing beside her. And at last her reluctant head turned slowly, and, slowly, her gaze searched his.

"Shall we rest?" he said.

"Yes. I am--tired."

Her dainty avalanche of skirts filled the stairs as she settled

there in silence; he at her feet, turned sideways so that he could look up into the brooding, absent eyes.

And over them again--over the small space just then allotted them in the world--was settling once more the intangible, indefinable spell awakened by their first light contact. Through its silence hurried their pulses; through its significance her dazed young eyes looked out into a haze where nothing stirred except a phantom heart, beating, beating the reveille. And the spell lay heavy on them both.

"I shall bear your image always. You know it."

She seemed scarcely to have heard him.

"There is no reason in what I say. I know it. Yet--I am destined never to forget you."

She made no sign.

"Ailsa Paige," he said mechanically.

And after a long while, slowly, she looked down at him where he sat at her feet, his dark eyes fixed on space.

CHAPTER II

All the morning she had been busy in the Craig's backyard garden, clipping, training, loosening the earth around lilac, honeysuckle, and Rose of Sharon. The little German florist on the corner had sent in two loads of richly fertilised soil and a barrel of forest mould. These she sweetened with lime, mixed in her small pan, and applied judiciously to the peach-tree by the grape-arbour, to the thickets of pearl-gray iris, to the beloved roses, prairie climber, Baltimore bell, and General Jacqueminot. A neighbour's cat, war-scarred and bold, traversing the fences in search of single combat, halted to watch her; an early bee, with no blossoms yet to rummage, passed and repassed, buzzing distractedly.

The Craig's next-door neighbour, Camilla Lent, came out on her back veranda and looked down with a sleepy nod of recognition and good-morning, stretching her pretty arms luxuriously in the sunshine.

"You look very sweet down there, Ailsa, in your pink gingham apron and garden gloves."

"And you look very sweet up there, Camilla, in your muslin frock and satin skin! And every time you yawn you resemble a plump,

white magnolia bud opening just enough to show the pink inside!"

"It's mean to call me plump!" returned Camilla reproachfully.

"Anyway, anybody would yawn with the Captain keeping the entire household awake all night. I vow, I haven't slept one wink since that wretched news from Charleston. He thinks he's a battery of horse artillery now; that's the very latest development; and I shed tears and the chandeliers shed prisms every time he manoeuvres."

"The dear old thing," said Mrs. Paige, smiling as she moved among the shrubs. For a full minute her sensitive lips remained tenderly curved as she stood considering the agricultural problems before her. Then she settled down again, naively--like a child on its haunches--and continued to mix nourishment for the roses.

Camilla, lounging sideways on her own veranda window sill, rested her head against the frame, alternately blinking down at the pretty widow through sleepy eyes, and patting her lips to control the persistent yawns that tormented her.

"I had a horrid dream, too," she said, "about the 'Seven Sisters.' I was Pluto to your Diavoline, and Philip Berkley was a phantom that grinned at everybody and rattled the bones; and I waked in a dreadful fright to hear uncle's spurred boots overhead, and that horrid noisy old sabre of his banging the best furniture.

"Then this morning just before sunrise he came into my bedroom, hair and moustache on end, and in full uniform, and attempted to read the Declaration of Independence to me--or maybe it was the Constitution--I don't remember--but I began to cry, and that always sends him off."

Ailsa's quick laugh and the tenderness of her expression were her only comments upon the doings of Josiah Lent, lately captain, United States dragoons.

Camilla yawned again, rose, and, arranging her spreading white skirts, seated herself on her veranda steps in full sunshine.

"We did have a nice party, didn't we, Ailsa?" she said, leaning a little sideways so that she could see over the fence and down into the Craig's backyard garden.

"I had such a good time," responded Ailsa, looking up radiantly.

"So did I. Billy Cortlandt is the most divine dancer. Isn't Evelyn Estcourt pretty?"

"She is growing up to be very beautiful some day. Stephen paid her a great deal of attention. Did you notice it?"

"Really? I didn't notice it," replied Camilla without enthusiasm.

"But," she added, "I did notice you and Phil Berkley on the stairs. It didn't take you long, did it?"

Ailsa's colour rose a trifle.

"We exchanged scarcely a dozen words," she observed sedately.

Camilla laughed.

"It didn't take you long," she repeated, "either of you. It was the swiftest case of fascination that I ever saw."

"You are absurd, Camilla."

"But isn't he perfectly fascinating? I think he is the most romantic-looking creature I ever saw. However," she added, folding her slender hands in resignation, "there is nothing else to him. He's accustomed to being adored; there's no heart left in him. I think it's dead."

Mrs. Paige stood looking up at her, trowel hanging loosely in her gloved hand.

"Did anything--kill it?" she asked carelessly.

"I don't think it ever lived very long. Anyway there is something missing in the man; something blank in him. A girl's time is wasted in wondering what is going on behind those adorable eyes of his. Because there is nothing going on--it's all on the surface--the charm, the man's engaging ways and manners--all surface. . . . I thought I'd better tell you, Ailsa."

"There was no necessity," said Ailsa calmly. "We scarcely exchanged a dozen words."

As she spoke she became aware of a shape behind the veranda windows, a man's upright figure passing and repassing. And now, at the open window, it suddenly emerged into full sunlight, a spare, sinewy, active gentleman of fifty, hair and moustache thickly white, a deep seam furrowing his forehead from the left ear to the roots of the hair above the right temple.

The most engaging of smiles parted the young widow's lips.

"Good morning, Captain Lent," she cried gaily. "You have neglected me dreadfully of late."

The Captain came to a rigid salute.

"April eleventh, eighteen-sixty-one!" he said with clean-cut precision. "Good morning, Mrs. Paige! How does your garden blow? Blow--blow ye wintry winds! Ahem! How have the roses wintered--the rose of yesterday?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir. I am afraid my sister's roses have not wintered very well. I'm really a little worried about them."

"_I_ am worried about nothing in Heaven, on Earth, or in Hell," said the Captain briskly. "God's will is doing night and day, Mrs. Paige. Has your brother-in-law gone to business?"

"Oh, yes. He and Stephen went at eight this morning."

"Is your sister-in-law well. God bless her!" shouted the Captain.

"Uncle, you _mustn't_ shout," remonstrated Camilla gently.

"I'm only exercising my voice,"--and to Ailsa:

"I neglect nothing, mental, physical, spiritual, that may be of the

slightest advantage to my country in the hour when every respiration, every pulse beat, every waking thought shall belong to the Government which I again shall have the honour of serving."

He bowed stiffly from the waist, to Ailsa, to his niece, turned right about, and marched off into the house, his white moustache bristling, his hair on end.

"Oh, dear," sighed Camilla patiently, "isn't it disheartening?"

"He is a dear," said Ailsa. "I adore him."

"Yes--if he'd only sleep at night. I am very selfish I suppose to complain; he is so happy and so interested these days--only--I am wondering--if there ever should be a war--would it break his poor old heart if he couldn't go? They'll never let him, you know."

Ailsa looked up, troubled:

"You mean--because!" she said in a low voice.

"Well I don't consider him anything more than delightfully eccentric."

"Neither do I. But all this is worrying me ill. His heart is so entirely wrapped up in it; he writes a letter to Washington every day, and nobody ever replies. Ailsa, it almost terrifies me to think what might happen--and he be left out!"

"Nothing will happen. The world is too civilised, dear."

"But the papers talk about nothing else! And uncle takes every paper in New York and Brooklyn, and he wants to have the editor of the Herald arrested, and he is very anxious to hang the entire staff of the Daily News. It's all well enough to stand there laughing, but I believe there'll be a war, and then my troubles will begin!"

Ailsa, down on her knees again, dabbled thoughtfully in the soil, exploring the masses of matted spider-wort for new shoots.

Camilla looked on, resignedly, her fingers playing with the loosened masses of her glossy black hair. Each was following in silence the idle drift of thought which led Camilla back to her birthday party.

"Twenty!" she said still more resignedly--"four years younger than you are, Ailsa Paige! Oh dear--and here I am, absolutely unmarried. That is not a very maidenly thought, I suppose, is it

Ailsa?"

"You always were a romantic child," observed Ailsa, digging vigorously in the track of a vanishing May beetle. But when she disinterred him her heart failed her and she let him scramble away.

"There! He'll probably chew up everything," she said. "What a sentimental goose I am!"

"The first trace of real sentiment I ever saw you display," began Camilla reflectively, "was the night of my party."

Ailsa dug with energy. "_That_ is absurd! And not even funny."

"You were sentimental!"

"I--well there is no use in answering you," concluded Ailsa.

"No, there isn't. I've seen women look at men, and men look back again--the way he did!"

"Dear, please don't say such things!"

"I'm going to say 'em," insisted Camilla with malicious satisfaction. "You've jeered at me because I'm tender-hearted about men. Now my chance has come!"

Ailsa began patiently: "There were scarcely a dozen words spoken----"

Camilla, delighted, shook her dark curls.

"You've said that before," she laughed. "Oh, you pretty minx!--you and your dozen words!"

Ailsa Paige arose in wrath and stretched out a warning arm among her leafless roses; but Camilla placed both hands on the fence top and leaned swiftly down from the veranda steps,

"Forgive me, dear," she said penitently. "I was only trying to torment you. Kiss me and make up. I know you too well to believe that you could care for a man of that kind."

Ailsa's face was very serious, but she lifted herself on tiptoe and they exchanged an amicable salute across the fence.

After a moment she said: "What did you mean by 'a man of _that_

kind'?"

Camilla's shrug was expressive. "There are stories about him."

Ailsa looked thoughtfully into space. "Well you won't say such things to me again, about any man--will you, dear?"

"You never minded them before. You used to laugh."

"But this time," said Ailsa Paige, "it is not the least bit funny.

We scarcely exchanged----"

She checked herself, flushing with annoyance. Camilla, leaning on the garden fence, had suddenly buried her face in both arms. In feminine plumpness, when young, there is usually something left of the schoolgirl giggler.

The pretty girl below remained disdainfully indifferent. She dug, she clipped, she explored, inhaling, with little thrills, the faint mounting odour of forest loam and sappy stems.

"I really must go back to New York and start my own garden," she said, not noticing Camilla's mischief. "London Terrace will be green in another week."

"How long do you stay with the Craigs, Ailsa?"

"Until the workmen finish painting my house and installing the new plumbing. Colonel Arran is good enough to look after it."

Camilla, her light head always ringing with gossip, watched Ailsa curiously.

"It's odd," she observed, "that Colonel Arran and the Craigs never exchange civilities."

"Mrs. Craig doesn't like him," said Ailsa simply.

"You do, don't you?"

"Naturally. He was my guardian."

"My uncle likes him. To me he has a hard face."

"He has a sad face," said Ailsa Paige.

CHAPTER III

Ailsa and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Craig, had been unusually reticent over their embroidery that early afternoon, seated together in the front room, which was now flooded with sunshine--an attractive, intimate room, restful and pretty in spite of the unlovely Victorian walnut furniture.

Through a sunny passageway they could look into Ailsa's bedroom--formerly the children's nursery--where her maid sat sewing.

Outside the open windows, seen between breezy curtains, new buds already clothed the great twisted ropes of pendant wistaria with a silvery-green down.

The street was quiet under its leafless double row of trees, maple, ailanthus, and catalpa; the old man who trudged his rounds regularly every week was passing now with his muffled shout:

Any old hats

Old coats

Old boots!

Any old mats

Old suits,

Old flutes! Ca-ash!

And, leaning near to the sill, Ailsa saw him shuffling along, green-baize bag bulging, a pyramid of stove-pipe hats crammed down over his ears.

At intervals from somewhere in the neighbourhood sounded the pleasant bell of the scissors grinder, and the not unmusical call of "Glass put in!" But it was really very tranquil there in the sunshine of Fort Greene Place, stiller even for the fluted call of an oriole aloft in the silver maple in front of the stoop.

He was a shy bird even though there were no imported sparrows to drive this lovely native from the trees of a sleepy city; and he sat very still in the top branches, clad in his gorgeous livery of orange and black, and scarcely stirred save to slant his head and peer doubtfully at last year's cocoons, which clung to the bark like shreds of frosted cotton.

Very far away, from somewhere in the harbour, a deep sound jarred the silence. Ailsa raised her head, needle suspended, listened for a moment, then resumed her embroidery with an unconscious sigh.

Her sister-in-law glanced sideways at her.

"I was thinking of Major Anderson, Celia," she said absently.

"So was I, dear. And of those who must answer for his gove'nment's madness,--God fo'give them."

There was no more said about the Major or his government. After a few moments Ailsa leaned back dreamily, her gaze wandering around the sunny walls of the room. In Ailsa Paige's eyes there was always a gentle caress for homely things. Just now they caressed the pictures of "Night" and "Morning," hanging there in their round gilt frames; the window boxes where hyacinths blossomed; the English ivy festooned to frame the window beside her sister-in-law's writing-desk; the melancholy engraving over the fireplace--"The Motherless Bairn"--a commonplace picture which harrowed her, but which nobody thought of discarding in a day when even the commonplace was uncommon.

She smiled in amused reminiscence of the secret tears she had wept over absurd things--of the funerals held for birds found dead--of the "Three Grains of Corn" poem which, when a child, elicited from her howls of anguish.

Little golden flashes of recollection lighted the idle path as her thoughts wandered along hazy ways which led back to her own nursery days; and she rested there, in memory, dreaming through the stillness of the afternoon.

She missed the rattle and noise of New York. It was a little too tranquil in Fort Greene Place; yet, when she listened intently, through the city's old-fashioned hush, very far away the voices of the great seaport were always audible--a ceaseless harmony of river whistles, ferry-boats signalling on the East River, ferry-boats on the North River, perhaps some mellow, resonant blast from the bay, where an ocean liner was heading for the Narrows. Always the street's stillness held that singing murmur, vibrant with deep undertones from dock and river and the outer sea.

Strange spicy odours, too, sometimes floated inland from the sugar wharves, miles away under the Heights, to mingle with the scent of lilac and iris in quiet, sunny backyards where whitewashed fences reflected the mid-day glare, and cats dozed in strategical positions on grape trellis and tin roofs of extensions, prepared for war or peace, as are all cats always, at all times.

"Celia!"

Celia Craig looked up tranquilly.

"Has anybody darned Paige's stockings?"

"No, she hasn't, Honey-bell. Paige and Marye must keep their stockings da'ned. I never could do anything fo' myse'f, and I

won't have my daughters brought up he'pless."

Ailsa glanced humorously across at her sister-in-law.

"You sweet thing," she said, "you can do anything, and you know it!"

"But I don't like to do anything any mo' than I did befo' I had to," laughed Celia Craig; and suddenly checked her mirth, listening with her pretty close-set ears.

"That is the do'-bell," she remarked, "and I am not dressed."

"It's almost too early for anybody to call," said Ailsa tranquilly.

But she was wrong, and when, a moment later, the servant came to announce Mr. Berkley, Ailsa regarded her sister-in-law in pink consternation.

"I did not ask him," she said. "We scarcely exchanged a dozen words. He merely said he'd like to call--on you--and now he's done it, Celia!"

Mrs. Craig calmly instructed the servant to say that they were at home, and the servant withdrew.

"Do you approve his coming--this way--without anybody inviting him?" asked Ailsa uneasily.

"Of co'se, Honey-bell. He is a Berkley. He should have paid his respects to us long ago."

"It was for him to mention the relationship when I met him. He did not speak of it, Celia."

"No, it was fo' you to speak of it first," said Celia Craig gently.

"But you did not know that."

"Why?"

"There are reasons, Honey-bud."

"What reasons?"

"They are not yo' business, dear," said her sister-in-law quietly.

Ailsa had already risen to examine herself in the mirror. Now she looked back over her shoulder and down into Celia's pretty

eyes--eyes as unspoiled as her own.

In Celia Craig remained that gracious and confident faith in kinship which her Northern marriage had neither extinguished nor chilled. The young man who waited below was a Berkley, a kinsman. Name and quality were keys to her hospitality. There was also another key which this man possessed, and it fitted a little locked compartment in Celia Craig's heart. But Ailsa had no knowledge of this. And now Mrs. Craig was considering the advisability of telling her--not all, perhaps,--but something of how matters stood between the House of Craig and the House of Berkley. But not how matters stood with the House of Arran.

"Honey-bud," she said, "you must be ve'y polite to this young man."

"I expect to be. Only I don't quite understand why he came so unceremoniously----"

"It would have been ruder to neglect us, little Puritan! I want to see Connie Berkley's boy. I'm glad he came."

Celia Craig, once Celia Marye Ormond Paige, stood watching her taller sister-in-law twisting up her hair and winding the thick braid around the crown of her head *_a la coronal_*. Little wonder that these two were so often mistaken for own sisters--the matron

not quite as tall as the young widow, but as slender, and fair, and cast in the same girlish mould.

Both inherited from their Ormond ancestry slightly arched and dainty noses and brows, delicate hands and feet, and the same splendid dull-gold hair--features apparently characteristic of the line, all the women of which had been toasts of a hundred years ago, before Harry Lee hunted men and the Shadow of the Swamp Fox flitted through the cypress to a great king's undoing.

Ailsa laid a pink bow against her hair and glanced at her sister-in-law for approval.

"I declare. Honey-bud, you are all rose colour to-day," said Celia Craig, smiling; and, on impulse, unpinned the pink-and-white cameo from her own throat and fastened it to Ailsa's breast.

"I reckon I'll slip on a gay gown myse'f," she added mischievously.

"I certainly am becoming ve'y tired of leaving the field to my sister-in-law, and my schoolgirl daughters."

"Does anybody ever look at us after you come into a room?" asked Ailsa, laughing; and, turning impulsively, she pressed Celia's pretty hands flat together and kissed them. "You darling," she said. An unaccountable sense of expectancy--almost of exhilaration

was taking possession of her. She looked into the mirror and stood content with what she saw reflected there.

"How much of a relation is he, Celia?" balancing the rosy bow with a little cluster of pink hyacinth on the other side.

Celia Craig, forefinger crooked across her lips, considered aloud.

"_His_ mother was bo'n Constance Berkley; _her_ mother was bo'n Betty Ormond; _her_ mother was bo'n Felicity Paige; _her_ mother----"

"Oh please! I don't care to know any more!" protested Ailsa, drawing her sister-in-law before the mirror; and, standing behind her, rested her soft, round chin on her shoulder, regarding the two reflected faces.

"That," observed the pretty Southern matron, "is conside'd ve'y bad luck. When I was a young girl I once peeped into the glass over my ole mammy's shoulder, and she said I'd sho'ly be punished befo' the year was done."

"And were you?"

"I don't exactly remember," said Mrs. Craig demurely, "but I think I first met my husband the very next day."

They both laughed softly, looking at each other in the mirror.

So, in her gown of rosy muslin, bouffant and billowy, a pink flower in her hair, and Celia's pink-and-white cameo at her whiter throat Ailsa Paige descended the carpeted stairs and came into the mellow dimness of the front parlour, where there was much rosewood, and a French carpet, and glinting prisms on the chandeliers,--and a young man, standing, dark against a bar of sunshine in which golden motes swam.

"How do you do," she said, offering her narrow hand, and: "Mrs. Craig is dressing to receive you. . . . It is warm for April, I think. How amiable of you to come all the way over from New York. Mr. Craig and his son Stephen are at business, my cousins, Paige and Marye, are at school. Won't you sit down?"

She had backed away a little distance from him, looking at him under brows bent slightly inward, and thinking that she had made no mistake in her memory of this man. Certainly his features were altogether too regular, his head and body too perfectly moulded into that dark and graceful symmetry which she had hitherto vaguely associated with things purely and mythologically Olympian.

Upright against the doorway, she suddenly recollected with a blush that she was staring like a schoolgirl, and sat down. And he drew up a chair before her and seated himself; and then under the billowy rose crinoline she set her pretty feet close together, folded her hands, and looked at him with a smiling composure which she no longer really felt.

"The weather," she repeated, "is unusually warm. Do you think that Major Anderson will hold out at Sumter? Do you think the fleet is going to relieve him? Dear me," she sighed, "where will it all end, Mr. Berkley?"

"In war," he said, also smiling; but neither of them believed it, or, at the moment, cared. There were other matters impending--since their first encounter.

"I have thought about you a good deal since Camilla's theatre party," he said pleasantly.

"Have you?" She scarcely knew what else to say--and regretted saying anything.

"Indeed I have. I dare not believe you have wasted as much as one thought on the man you danced with once--and refused ever after."

She felt, suddenly, a sense of uneasiness in being near him.

"Of course I have remembered you, Mr. Berkley," she said with composure. "Few men dance as well. It has been an agreeable memory to me."

"But you would not dance with me again."

"I--there were--you seemed perfectly contented to sit out--the rest--with me."

He considered the carpet attentively. Then looking up with quick, engaging smile:

"I want to ask you something. May I?"

She did not answer. As it had been from the first time she had ever seen him, so it was now with her; a confused sense of the necessity for caution in dealing with a man who had inspired in her such an unaccountable inclination to listen to what he chose to say.

"What is it you wish to ask?" she inquired pleasantly.

"It is this: are you really surprised that I came? Are you, in your heart?"

"Did I appear to be very much agitated? Or my heart, either, Mr. Berkley?" she asked with a careless laugh, conscious now of her quickening pulses. Outwardly calm, inwardly Irresolute, she faced him with a quiet smile of confidence.

"Then you were not surprised that I came?" he insisted.

"You did not wait to be asked. That surprised me a little."

"I did wait. But you didn't ask me."

"That seems to have made no difference to you," she retorted, laughing.

"It made this difference. I seized upon the only excuse I had and came to pay my respects as a kinsman. Do you know that I am a relation?"

"That is a very pretty compliment to us all, I think."

"It is you who are kind in accepting me."

"As a relative, I am very glad to----"

"I came," he said, "to see you. And you know it."

"But you couldn't do that, uninvited! I had not asked you."

"But--it's done," he said.

She sat very still, considering him. Within her, subtle currents seemed to be contending once more, disturbing her equanimity. She said, sweetly:

"I am not as offended as I ought to be. But I do not see why you should disregard convention with me."

"I didn't mean it that way," he said, leaning forward. "I couldn't stand not seeing you. That was all. Convention is a pitiful thing--sometimes--" He hesitated, then fell to studying the carpet.

She looked at him, silent in her uncertainty. His expression was grave, almost absent-minded. And again her troubled eyes rested on

the disturbing symmetry of feature and figure in all the unconscious grace of repose; and in his immobility there seemed something even of nobility about him which she had not before noticed.

She stole another glance at him. He remained very still, leaning forward, apparently quite oblivious of her. Then he came to himself with a quick smile, which she recognised as characteristic of all that disturbed her about this man--a smile in which there was humour, a little malice and self-sufficiency and--many, many things she did not try to analyse.

"Don't you really want an unreliable servant?" he asked.

His perverse humour perplexed her, but she smiled.

"Don't you remember that I once asked you if you needed an able-bodied man?" he insisted.

She nodded.

"Well, I'm that man."

She assented, smiling conventionally, not at all understanding. He

laughed, too, thoroughly enjoying something.

"It isn't really very funny," he said, "Ask your brother-in-law. I had an interview with him before I came here. And I think there's a chance that he may give me a desk and a small salary in his office."

"How absurd!" she said.

"It is rather absurd. I'm so absolutely useless. It's only because of the relationship that Mr. Craig is doing this."

She said uneasily: "You are not really serious, are you?"

"Grimly serious."

"About a--a desk and a salary--in my brother-in-law's office?"

"Unless you'll hire me as a useful man. Otherwise, I hope for a big desk and a small salary. I went to Mr. Craig this morning, and the minute I saw him I knew he was fine enough to be your brother-in-law. And I said, 'I am Philip Ormond Berkley; how do you do!' And he said, 'How do you do!' And I said, 'I'm a relation,' and he said, 'I believe so.' And I said, 'I was

educated at Harvard and in Leipsic; I am full of useless accomplishments, harmless erudition, and insolvent amiability, and I am otherwise perfectly worthless. Can you give me a position?"

"And he said: 'What else is the matter?' And I said, 'The stock market.' And that is how it remains, I am to call on him to-morrow."

She said in consternation: "Forgive me. I did not think you meant it. I did not know that you were--were----"

"Ruined!" he nodded laughingly. "I am, practically. I have a little left--badly invested--which I'm trying to get at. Otherwise matters are gay enough."

She said wonderingly: "Had this happened when--I saw you that first time?"

"It had just happened. I looked the part, didn't I?"

"No. How could you be so--interesting and--and be--what you were--knowing this all the while?"

"I went to that party absolutely stunned. I saw you in a corner of

the box--I had just been hearing about you--and--I don't know now what I said to you. Afterward"--he glanced at her--"the world was spinning, Mrs. Paige. You only remained real--" His face altered subtly. "And when I touched you----"

"I gave you a waltz, I believe," she said, striving to speak naturally; but her pulses had begun to stir again; the same inexplicable sense of exhilaration and insecurity was creeping over her.

With a movement partly nervous she turned toward the door, but there sounded no rustle of her sister's skirts from the stairs, and her reluctant eyes slowly reverted to him, then fell in silence, out of which she presently strove to extract them both with some casual commonplace.

He said in a low voice, almost to himself:

"I want you to think well of me."

She gathered all her composure, steadied her senses to choose a reply, and made a blunder:

"Do you really care what I think?" she asked lightly, and bit her lip too late.

"Do you believe I care about anything else in the world--now?"

She went on bravely, blindly:

"And do you expect me to believe in--in such an exaggerated and romantic expression to a staid and matter-of-fact widow whom you never saw more than once in your life?"

"You do believe it."

Confused, scarcely knowing what she was saying, she still attempted to make light of his words, holding her own against herself for the moment, making even some headway. And all the while she was aware of mounting emotion--a swift inexplicable charm falling over them both.

He had become silent again, and she was saying she knew not what--fortifying her common-sense with gay inconsequences, when he looked up straight into her eyes.

"I have distressed you. I should not have spoken as I did."

"No, you should not----"

"Have I offended you?"

"I--don't know."

Matters were running too swiftly for her; she strove to remain cool, collected, but confusion was steadily threatening her, and neither resentment nor indifference appeared as allies.

"Mrs. Paige, can you account for--that night? The moment I touched you----"

She half rose, sank back into her seat, her startled eyes meeting his.

"I--don't know what you mean."

"Yes--you know."

Flushed, voices unsteady, they no longer recognised themselves.

"You have never seen me but once," she said. "You cannot believe----"

"I have not known a moment's peace since I first saw you."

She caught her breath. "It is your business worries that torment you----"

"It is desire to be near you."

"I don't think you had better say such a thing----"

"I know I had better not. But it is said, and it is true. I'm not trying to explain it to you or to myself. It's just true. There has not been one moment, since I saw you, which has been free from memory of you----"

"Please----"

"I scarcely know what I am saying--but it's true!" He checked himself. "I'm losing my head now, which isn't like me!" He choked and stood up; she could not move; every nerve in her had become tense with emotions so bewildering that mind and body remained fettered.

He was walking to and fro, silent and white under his self-control.

She, seated, gazed at him as though stunned, but every pulse was riotously unsteady.

"I suppose you think me crazy," he said hoarsely, "but I've not known a moment's peace of mind since that night--not one! I _couldn't_ keep away any longer. I can't even hold my tongue now, though I suppose it's ruining me every time I move it. It's a crazy thing to come here and say what I'm saying."

He went over and sat down again, and bent his dark gaze on the floor. Then:

"Can you forgive what I have done to you?"

She tried to answer, and only made a sign of faint assent. She no longer comprehended herself or the emotions menacing her. A curious tranquillity quieted her at moments--intervals in which she seemed to sit apart watching the development of another woman, listening to her own speech, patient with her own silences. There was a droop to her shoulders now; his own were sagging as he leaned slightly forward in his chair, arms resting on his knees, while around them the magic ebbed, eddied, ebbed; and lassitude succeeded tension; and she stirred, looked up at him with eyes that seemed dazed at first, then widened slowly into waking; and he saw in them the first clear dawn of alarm. Suddenly she flushed and sprang to her feet, the bright colour surging to her hair.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't reason! There will be nothing left of me if you do--or of, these moments. You will hate them--and me, if you reason. Don't think--until we see each other again!"

She dropped her eyes slowly, and slowly shook her head.

"You ask too much," she said. "You should not have said that."

All the glamour was fading. Her senses were seeking their balance after the incredible storm that had whirled them into chaos.

Fear stirred sharply, then consternation--flashes of panic pierced her with darts of shame, as though she had been in physical contact with this man.

All her outraged soul leaped to arms, quivering now under the reaction; the man's mere presence was becoming unendurable; the room stifled her. She turned, scarce knowing what she was doing; and at the same moment her sister-in-law entered.

Berkley, already on his feet, turned short: and when she offered him a hand as slim and white as Ailsa's, he glanced inquiringly at the latter, not at all certain who this charming woman might be.

"Mrs. Craig," said Ailsa.

"I don't believe it," he said. "You haven't grown-up children!"

"Don't you really believe it, Mr. Berkley? Or is it just the flattering Irish in you that natters us poor women to our destruction?"

He had sense and wit enough to pay her a quick and really graceful compliment; to which she responded, still laughing:

"Oh, it is the Ormond in you! I am truly ve'y glad you came. You are Constance Berkley's son--Connie Berkley! The sweetest girl that ever lived."

There was a silence. Then Mrs. Craig said gently:

"I was her maid of honour, Mr. Berkley."

Ailsa raised her eyes to his altered face, startled at the change in it. He looked at her absently, then his gaze reverted to Ailsa Paige.

"I loved her dearly," said Mrs. Craig, dropping a light, impulsive

hand on his. "I want her son to know it."

Her eyes were soft and compassionate; her hand still lingered lightly on his, and she let it rest so.

"Mrs. Craig," he said, "_you_ are the most real person I have known in many years among the phantoms. I thought your sister-in-law was. But you are still more real."

"Am I?" she laid her other hand over his, considering him earnestly. Ailsa looking on, astonished, noticed a singular radiance on his face--the pale transfiguration from some quick inward illumination.

Then Celia Craig's voice sounded almost caressingly:

"I think you should have come to see us long ago." A pause. "You are as welcome in this house as your mother would be if she were living. I love and honour her memory."

"I have honoured little else in the world," he said. They looked at one another for a moment; then her quick smile broke out. "I have an album. There are some Paiges, Ormonds, and Berkleys in it----"

Ailsa came forward slowly.

"Shall I look for it, Celia?"

"No, Honey-bell." She turned lightly and went into the back parlour, smiling mysteriously to herself, her vast, pale-blue crinoline rustling against the furniture.

"My sister-in-law," said Ailsa, after an interval of silent constraint, "is very Southern. Any sort of kinship means a great deal to her. I, of course, am Northern, and regard such matters as unimportant."

"It is very gracious of Mrs. Craig to remember it," he said. "I know nothing finer than confidence in one's own kin."

She flushed angrily. "I have not that confidence--in kinsman."

For a moment their eyes met. Hers were hard as purple steel.

"Is that final?"

"Yes."

The muscles in his cheeks grew tense, then into his eyes came that reckless glimmer which in the beginning she had distrusted--a gay, irresponsible radiance which seemed to mock at all things worthy.

He said: "No, it is not final. I shall come back to you."

She answered him in an even, passionless voice:

"A moment ago I was uncertain; now I know you. You are what they say you are. I never wish to see you again."

Celia Craig came back with the album. Berkley sprang to relieve her of the big book and a box full of silhouettes, miniatures, and daguerreotypes. They placed the family depository upon the table and then bent over it together.

Ailsa remained standing by the window, looking steadily at nothing, a burning sensation in both cheeks.

At intervals, through the intensity of her silence, she heard Celia's fresh, sweet laughter, and Berkley's humorous and engaging voice. She glanced sideways at the back of his dark curly head where it bent beside Celia's over the album. What an insolently

reckless head it was! She thought that she had never before seen the back of any man's head so significant of character--or the want of it. And the same quality--or the lack of it--now seemed to her to pervade his supple body, his well-set shoulders, his voice, every movement, every feature--something everywhere about him that warned and troubled.

[Illustration: "What an insolently reckless head it was!"]

Suddenly the blood burnt her cheeks with a perfectly incomprehensible desire to see his face again. She heard her sister-in-law saying:

"We Paiges and Berkleys are kin to the Ormonds and the Earls of Ossory. The Estcourts, the Paiges, the Craigs, the Lents, the Berkleys, intermarried a hundred years ago. . . . My grandmother knew yours, but the North is very strange in such matters. . . . Why did you never before come?"

He said: "It's one of those things a man is always expecting to do, and is always astonished that he hasn't done. Am I unpardonable?"

"I did not mean it in that way."

He turned his dark, comely head and looked at her as they bent

together above the album.

"I know you didn't. My answer was not frank. The reason I never came to you before was that--I did not know I would be welcomed."

Their voices dropped. Ailsa standing by the window, watching the orioles in the maple, could no longer distinguish what they were saying.

He said: "You were bridesmaid to my mother. You are the Celia Paige of her letters."

"She is always Connie Berkley to me. I loved no woman better. I love her still."

"I found that out yesterday. That is why I dared come. I found, among the English letters, one from you to her, written--_after_."

"I wrote her again and again. She never replied. Thank God, she knew I loved her to the last."

He rested on the tabletop and stood leaning over and looking down.

"Dear Mr. Berkley," she murmured gently.

He straightened himself, passed a hesitating hand across his forehead, ruffling the short curly hair. Then his preoccupied gaze wandered. Ailsa turned toward him at the same moment, and instantly a flicker of malice transformed the nobility of his set features:

"It seems," he said, "that you and I are irrevocably related in all kinds of delightful ways, Mrs. Paige. Your sister-in-law very charmingly admits it, graciously overlooks and pardons my many delinquencies, and has asked me to come again. Will you ask me, too?"

Ailsa merely looked at him.

Mrs. Craig said, laughing: "I knew you were all Ormond and entirely Irish as soon as I came in the do'--befo' I became aware of your racial fluency. I speak fo' my husband and myse'f when I say, please remember that our do' is ve'y wide open to our own kin--and that you are of them----"

"Oh, I'm all sorts of things beside--" He paused for a second--"Cousin Celia," he added so lightly that the grace with which he said it covered the impudence, and she laughed in semi-critical approval and turned to Ailsa, whose smile in response

was chilly--chillier still when Berkley did what few men have done convincingly since powdered hair and knee-breeches became unfashionable--bent to salute Celia Craig's fingertips. Then he turned to her and took his leave of her in a conventional manner entirely worthy of the name his mother bore,--and her mother before her, and many a handsome man and many a beautiful woman back to times when a great duke stood unjustly attainted, and the Ormonds served their king with steel sword and golden ewer; and served him faithfully and well.

Camilla Lent called a little later. Ailsa was in the backyard garden, a trowel in her hand, industriously loosening the earth around the prairie roses.

"Camilla," she said, looking up from where she was kneeling among the shrubs, "what was it you said this morning about Mr. Berkley being some unpleasant kind of man?"

"How funny," laughed Camilla. "You asked me that twice before."

"Did I? I forgot," said Mrs. Paige with a shrug; and, bending over again, became exceedingly busy with her trowel until the fire in her cheeks had cooled.

"Every woman that ever saw him becomes infatuated with Phil

Berkley," said Camilla cheerfully. "I was. You will be. And the worst of it is he's simply not worth it."

"I--thought not."

"Why did you think not?"

"I don't know why."

"He can be fascinating," said Camilla reflectively, "but he doesn't always trouble himself to be."

"Doesn't he?" said Ailsa with a strange sense of relief.

Camilla hesitated, lowered her voice.

"They say he is fast," she whispered. Ailsa, on her knees, turned and looked up.

"Whatever that means," added Camilla, shuddering. "But all the same, every girl who sees him begins to adore him immediately until her parents make her stop."

"How silly," said Ailsa in a leisurely level voice. But her heart was beating furiously, and she turned to her roses with a blind energy that threatened them root and runner.

"How did you happen to think of him at all?" continued Camilla mischievously.

"He called on--Mrs. Craig this afternoon."

"I didn't know she knew him."

"They are related--distantly--I believe----"

"Oh," exclaimed Camilla. "I'm terribly sorry I spoke that way about him, dear----"

"_I_ don't care what you say about him," returned Ailsa Paige fiercely, emptying some grains of sand out of one of her gloves; resolutely emptying her mind, too, of Philip Berkley.

"Dear," she added gaily to Camilla, "come in and we'll have tea and gossip, English fashion. And I'll tell you about my new duties at the Home for Destitute Children--every morning from ten to twelve, my dear, in their horrid old infirmary--the poor little

darlings!--and I would be there all day if I wasn't a selfish, indolent, pleasure-loving creature without an ounce of womanly feeling--Yes I am! I must be, to go about to galleries and dances and Philharmonics when there are motherless children in that infirmary, as sick for lack of love as for the hundred and one ailments distressing their tender little bodies."

But over their tea and marmalade and toast she became less communicative; and once or twice the conversation betrayed an unexpected tendency to drift toward Berkley.

"I haven't the slightest curiosity concerning him, dear," said Ailsa, attempting corroboration in a yawn--which indiscretion she was unable to accomplish.

"Well," remarked Camilla, "the chances are that you've seen the last of him if you showed it too plainly. Men don't come back when a girl doesn't wish them to. Do they?"

After Camilla had gone, Ailsa roamed about the parlours, apparently renewing her acquaintance with the familiar decorations. Sometimes she stood at windows, looking thoughtfully into the empty street; sometimes she sat in corners, critically surveying empty space.

Yes, the chances were that he would scarcely care to come back. A man of that kind did not belong in her sister-in-law's house, anyway, nor in her own--a man who could appeal to a woman for a favourable opinion of himself, asking her to suspend her reason, stifle logic, stultify her own intelligence, and trust to a sentimental impulse that he deserved the toleration and consideration which he asked for. . . . It was certainly well for her that he should not return. . . . It would be better for her to lay the entire matter before her sister-in-law--that was what she would do immediately!

She sprang to her feet and ran lightly up-stairs; but, fast as she fled, thought outran her slender flying feet, and she came at last very leisurely into Celia's room, a subdued, demure opportunist, apparently with nothing on her mind and conscience,

"If I may have the carriage at ten, Celia, I'll begin on the Destitute Children to-morrow. . . . Poor babies! . . . If they only had once a week as wholesome food as is wasted in this city every day by Irish servants . . . which reminds me--I suppose you will have to invite your new kinsman to dine with you."

"There is loads of time for that, Honey-bud," said her sister-in-law, glancing up absently from the note she was writing.

"I was merely wondering whether it was necessary at all," observed

Ailsa Paige, without interest.

But Celia had begun to write again. "I'll ask him," she said in her softly preoccupied voice, "Saturday, I think."

"Oh, but I'm invited to the Cortlandt's," began Ailsa, and caught her under lip in her teeth. Then she turned and walked noiselessly into her bedroom, and sat down on the bed and looked at the wall.

CHAPTER IV

It was almost mid-April; and still the silvery-green tassels on the wistaria showed no hint of the blue petals folded within; but the maples' leafless symmetry was already veined with fire. Faint perfume from Long Island woodlands, wandering puffs of wind from salt meadows freshened the city streets; St. Felix Street boasted a lilac bush in leaf; Oxford Street was gay with hyacinths and a winter-battered butterfly; and in Fort Greene Place the grassy door-yards were exquisite with crocus bloom. Peace, good-will, and spring on earth; but in men's souls a silence as of winter.

To Northland folk the unclosing buds of April brought no awakening; lethargy fettered all, arresting vigour, sapping desire. An immense inertia chained progress in its tracks, while overhead the gray storm-wrack fled away,--misty, monstrous, gale-driven before

the coming hurricane.

Still, for the Northland, there remained now little of the keener suspense since those first fiery outbursts in the South; but all through the winter the dull pain throbbed in silence as star after star dropped from the old galaxy and fell flashing into the new.

And it was a time of apathy, acquiescence, stupefied incredulity; a time of dull faith in destiny, duller resignation.

The printed news was read day after day by a people who understood nothing, neither the cautious arming nor the bold disarming, nor the silent fall of fortified places, nor the swift dismantling of tall ships--nor did they comprehend the ceaseless tremors of a land slowly crumbling under the subtle pressure--nor that at last the vast disintegration of the matrix would disclose the forming crystal of another nation cradled there, glittering, naming under the splendour of the Southern skies.

A palsied Old Year had gone out. The mindless old man--he who had been President--went with it. A New Year had come in, and on its infant heels shambled a tall, gaunt shape that seated itself by the White House windows and looked out into the murk of things with eyes that no man understood.

And now the soft sun of April spun a spell upon the Northland folk;
for they had eyes but they saw not; ears had they, but they heard
not; neither spoke they through the mouth.

To them only one figure seemed real, looming above the vast and
motionless mirage where a continent stood watching the parapets of
a sea-girt fort off Charleston.

But the nation looked too long; the mirage closed in; fort, sea,
the flag itself, became unreal; the lone figure on the parapet
turned to a phantom. God's will was doing. Who dared doubt?

"There seems to be no doubt in the South," observed Ailsa Paige to
her brother-in-law one fragrant evening after dinner where, in the
dusk, the family had gathered on the stoop after the custom of a
simpler era.

Along the dim street long lines of front stoops blossomed with the
light spring gowns of women and young girls, pale, dainty clusters
in the dusk set with darker figures, where sparks from cigars
glowed and waned in the darkness.

Windows were open, here and there a gas jet in a globe flickered
inside a room, but the street was dusky and tranquil as a country
lane, and unilluminated save where at far intervals lamp-posts

stood in a circle of pale light, around which a few moths hovered.

"The rebels," repeated Ailsa, "appear to have no doubts, honest or otherwise. They've sent seven thousand troops to the Charleston fortifications--the paper says."

Stephen Craig heard his cousin speak but made no response. He was smoking openly and in sight of his entire family the cigar which had, heretofore, been consumed surreptitiously. His mother sat close to his shoulder, rallying him like a tormenting schoolgirl, and, at intervals, turning to look back at her husband who stood on the steps beside her, a little amused, a little proud, a little inclined to be critical of this tall son of his who yesterday had been a boy.

The younger daughters of the house, Paige and Marye, strolled past, bareheaded, arms linked, in company with Camilla and Jimmy Lent.

"O dad!" called out Paige softly, "Jim says that Major Anderson is to be reinforced at once. There was a bulletin this evening."

"I am very glad to hear it, sweetheart," said her father, smiling through his eye-glasses.

Stephen bent forward across his mother's shoulder. "Is that true,

father?"

"Camilla's brother has probably been reading the Tribune's evening bulletin. The Herald bulletin says that the Cabinet has ordered the evacuation of Fort Sumter; the Times says Major Anderson is to be reinforced; the World says that he abandoned the fort last night; and they all say he has been summoned to surrender. Take your choice, Steve," he added wearily. "There is only one wire working from the South, and the rebels control that."

"Are you tired, Curt?" asked his wife, looking around and up at him.

He seated himself and readjusted his eye-glasses.

"No, dear--only of this nightmare we are living in"--he stopped abruptly. Politics had been avoided between them. There was a short silence; he felt his wife's hand touch his in the darkness--sign of a tender respect for his perplexity, but not for his political views.

"Forgive me, dear, for using the word 'rebel,'" he said, smiling and straightening his shoulders. "Where have you and Ailsa been to-day? Did you go to New York?"

"Yes. We saw the Academy, and, oh, Curt! there are some very

striking landscapes--two by Gifford; and the cutest portrait of a girl by Wiyam Hunt. And your friend Bierstadt has a Western scene--all fireworks! and, dear, Eastman Johnson was there--and Kensett sent such a cunning little landscape. We lunched at Taylor's." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Ailsa did look too cute fo' words. I declare she is the most engaging little minx. Eve'y man sta'ed at her. I _wish_ she would marry again and be happy. _She_ doesn't know what a happy love affair can be--poor baby."

"Do you?" asked her husband.

"Are you beginning to co't me again, Curt?"

"Have I ever ceased?--you little Rebel!"

"No," she said under her breath.

"By the way, Celia," he said smiling, "that young man--cousin of yours--Berkley, turned up promptly to-day. I gave him a room in the office."

"That was certainly ve'y frien'ly of you, Curt!" she responded warmly. "You _will_ be patient with him, won't you?"

"I've had to be already. I gave him a commission to collect some rents and he came back fifty dollars short, calmly explaining that one of our lodgers looked poor and he hated to ask for the rent."

"O Curt--the boy is ve'y sweet and wa'm-hearted. Were you cross with him?"

"Not very. I imparted a few plain truths--very pleasantly, Celia. He knew better; there's a sort of an impish streak in him--also an inclination for the pleasant by-ways of life. . . . He had better let drink alone, too, if he expects to remain in my office. I told him that."

"Does he--the foolish baby!"

"Oh, probably not very much. I don't know; he's likable, but--he hasn't inspired me with any overwhelming respect and confidence. His record is not exactly savoury. But he's your protege, and I'll stand him as long as you can."

"Thank you, Curt. We must be gentle to him. I shall ask him to dinner and we can give a May dance perhaps--something informal and pretty--What is the matter, Curt?"

"Nothing, dear. . . . Only I wouldn't plan anything just yet--I mean for the present--not for a few days, anyway----"

He shrugged, removed his glasses, polished them on his handkerchief, and sat holding them, his short-sighted eyes lost in reverie.

His wife endured it to the limit of patience:

"Curt," she began in a lower voice, "you and I gen'ally avoid certain matters, dear--but--ev'ything is sure to come right in the end--isn't it? The No'th is going to be sensible."

"In the--end," he admitted quietly. And between them the ocean sprang into view again.

"I wonder--" She stopped, and an inexplicable uneasiness stirred in her breast. She looked around at her son, her left hand fell protectingly upon his shoulder, her right, groping, touched her husband's sleeve.

"I am--well cared for--in the world," she sighed happily to herself. "It shall not come nigh me."

Stephen was saying to Ailsa:

"There's a piece of up-town property that came into the office to-day which seems to me significant of the future. It would be a good investment for you, Cousin Ailsa. Some day Fifth Avenue will be built up solidly with brown-stone mansions as far as the Central Park. It is all going to be wonderfully attractive when they finish it."

Ailsa mused for a moment. Then:

"I walked down this street to Fort Greene this afternoon," she began, "and the little rocky park was so sweet and fragrant with dogwood and Forsythia and new buds everywhere. And I looked out over the rivers and the bay and over the two cities and, Steve, somehow--I don't know why--I found my eyes filling with tears. I don't know why, Steve----"

"Feminine sentiment," observed her cousin, smoking.

Mrs. Craig's fingers became restless on her husband's sleeve; she spoke at moments in soft, wistful tones, watching her younger daughters and their friends grouped under the trees in the dusk. And all the time, whatever it was that had brought a new unease into her breast was still there, latent. She had no name to give

it, no reason, no excuse; it was too shadowy to bear analysis, too impalpable to be defined, yet it remained there; she was perfectly conscious of it, as she held her husband's sleeve the tighter.

"Curt, is business so plaguey poor because of all these politics?"

"My business is not very flourishing. Many men feel the uncertainty; not everybody, dear."

"When this--_matter_--is settled, everything will be easier for you, won't it? You look so white and tired, dear."

Stephen overheard her.

"The _matter_, as you call it, won't be settled without a row, mother--if you mean the rebellion."

"Such a wise boy with his new cigar," she smiled through a sudden resurgence of uneasiness.

The boy said calmly: "Mother, you don't understand; and all the rest of the South is like you."

"Does anybody understand, Steve?" asked his father, slightly

ironical.

"Some people understand there's going to be a big fight," said the boy.

"Oh. Do you?"

"Yes," he said, with the conviction of youth. "And I'm wondering who's going to be in it."

"The militia, of course," observed Ailsa scornfully. "Camilla is forever sewing buttons on Jimmy's dress uniform. He wears them off dancing."

Mr. Craig said, unsmiling: "We are not a military nation, Steve; we are not only non-military but we are unmilitary--if you know what that means."

"We once managed to catch Cornwallis," suggested his son, still proudly smoking.

"I wonder how we did it?" mused his father.

"They were another race--those catchers of Cornwallis--those

fellows in, blue-and-buff and powdered hair."

"You and Celia are their grandchildren," observed Ailsa, "and you are a West Point graduate."

Her brother-in-law looked at her with a strange sort of humour in his handsome, near-sighted eyes:

"Yes, too blind to serve the country that educated me. And now it's too late; the desire is gone; I have no inclination to fight, Ailsa. Drums always annoyed me. I don't particularly like a gun. I don't care for a fuss. I don't wish to be a soldier."

Ailsa said: "I rather like the noise of drums. I think I'd like--war."

"Molly Pitcher! Molly Pitcher! Of what are you babbling," whispered Celia, laughing down the flashes of pain that ran through her heart. "Wars are ended in our Western World. Didn't you know it, grandchild of Vikings? There are to be no more Lake Champlains, only debates--_n'est ce pas_, Curt?--very grand debates between gentlemen of the South and gentlemen of the North in Congress assembled----"

"_Two_ congresses assembled," said Ailsa calmly, "and the debates

will be at long range----"

"By magnetic telegraph if you wish, Honey-bell," conceded Celia hastily. "Oh, we must not begin disputin' about matters that nobody can possibly he'p. It will all come right; you know it will, don't you, Curt?"

"Yes, I know it, somehow."

Silence, fragrance, and darkness, through which rang the distant laugh of a young girl. And, very, very far away sounds arose in the city, dull, indistinct, lost for moments at a time, then audible again, and always the same sounds, the same monotony, and distant persistence.

"I do believe they're calling an extra," said Ailsa, lifting her head to listen.

Celia listened, too.

"Children shouting at play," she said.

"They are calling an extra, Celia!"

"No, little Cassandra, it's only boys skylarking."

For a while they remained listening and silent. The voices still persisted, but they sounded so distant that the light laughter from their neighbour's stoop drowned the echoes.

Later, Jimmy Lent drifted into the family circle.

"They say that there's an extra out about Fort Sumter," he said.

"Do you think he's given up, Mr. Craig?"

"If there's an extra out the fort is probably safe enough, Jim," said the elder man carelessly. He rose and went toward the group of girls and youths under the trees.

"Come, children," he said to his two daughters; and was patient amid indignant protests which preceded the youthful interchange of reluctant good-nights.

When he returned to the stoop Ailsa had gone indoors with her cousin. His wife rose to greet him as though he had been away on a long journey, and then, passing her arms around her schoolgirl daughters, and nodding a mischievous dismissal to Jimmy Lent, walked slowly into the house. Bolts were shot, keys turned; from

the lighted front parlour came the notes of the sweet-toned square piano, and Ailsa's voice:

--"Dear are her charms to me,
Dearest her constancy,
Aileen aroon--"

"Never mind any more of that silly song!" exclaimed Celia, imprisoning Ailsa's arms from behind.

"Youth must with time decay,
Aileen aroon,
Beauty must fade away,
Aileen aroon--"

"Don't, dear! please----"

But Ailsa sang on obstinately:

"Castles are sacked in war,
Chieftains are scattered far,
Truth is a fixed star,
Aileen aroon."

And, glancing back over her shoulder, caught her breath quickly.

"Celia! What _is_ the matter, dear?"

"Nothing. I don't like such songs--just now----"

"What songs?"

"I don't know, Ailsa; songs about war and castles. Little things plague me. . . . There's been altogether too much talk about war--it gets into ev'ything, somehow. I can't seem to he'p it, somehow----"

"Why, Celia! _You_ are not worrying?"

"Not fo' myse'f, Honey-bud. Somehow, to-night--I don't know--and Curt seemed a little anxious."

She laughed with an effort; her natural gaiety returned to buoy her above this indefinable undercurrent of unrest.

Paige and Marye came in from the glass extension where their father was pacing to and fro, smoking his bedtime cigar, and their mother began her invariable running comment concerning the day's events,

rallying her children, tenderly tormenting them with their shortcomings--undarned stockings, lessons imperfectly learned, little household tasks neglected--she was always aware of and ready at bedtime to point out every sin of omission.

"As fo' you, Paige, you are certainly a ve'y rare kind of Honey-bird, and I reckon Mr. Ba'num will sho'ly catch you some day fo' his museum. Who ever heard of a shif'less Yankee girl except you and Marye?"

"O mother, how _can_ we mend _everything_ we tear? It's heartless to ask us!"

"You don't have to try to mend _ev'y_ thing. Fo' example, there's Jimmy Lent's heart----"

A quick outbreak of laughter swept them--all except Paige, who flushed furiously over her first school-girl affair.

"That poor Jimmy child came to me about it," continued their mother, "and asked me if I would let you be engaiged to him; and I said, 'Certainly, if Paige wants to be, Jimmy. I was engaiged myse'f fo' times befo' I was fo'teen----'"

Another gale of laughter drowned her words, and she sat there

dimpled, mischievous, naively looking around, yet in her careful soul shrewdly pursuing her wise policy of airing all sentimental matters in the family circle--letting in fresh air and sunshine on what so often takes root and flourishes rather morbidly at sixteen.

"It's perfectly absurd," observed Ailsa, "at your age, Paige----"

"Mother was married at sixteen! Weren't you, dearest?"

"I certainly was; but I am a bad rebel and you are good little Yankees; and good little Yankees wait till they're twenty odd before they do anything very ridiculous."

"We expect to wait," said Paige, with a dignified glance at her sister.

"You've four years to wait, then," laughed Marye.

"What's the use of being courted if you have to wait four years?"

"And you've three years to wait, silly," retorted Paige. "But I don't care; I'd rather wait. It isn't very long, now. Ailsa, why don't you marry again?"

Ailsa's lip curled her comment upon the suggestion. She sat under the crystal chandelier reading a Southern newspaper which had been sent recently to Celia. Presently her agreeable voice sounded in appreciative recitation of what she was reading.

"Hath not the morning dawned with added light?

And shall not evening call another star

Out of the infinite regions of the night

To mark this day in Heaven? At last we are

A nation among nations; and the world

Shall soon behold in many a distant port

Another flag unfurled!"

"Listen, Celia," she said, "this is really beautiful:

A tint of pink fire touched Mrs. Craig's cheeks, but she said

nothing. And Ailsa went on, breathing out the opening beauty of

Timrod's "Ethnogenesis":

"Now come what may, whose favour need we court?

And, under God, whose thunder need we fear?"

She stopped short, considering the printed page. Then, doubtfully:

"And what if, mad with wrongs themselves have wrought,

In their own treachery caught,

By their own fears made bold,
And leagued with him of old
Who long since, in the limits of the North,
Set up his evil throne, and warred with God--
What if, both mad and blinded in their rage
Our foes should fling us down the mortal gauge,
And with a hostile horde profane our sod!"

The girl reddened, sat breathing a little faster, eyes on the page;
then:

"Nor would we shun the battleground!
. . . The winds in our defence
Shall seem to blow; to us the hills shall lend
Their firmness and their calm,
And in our stiffened sinews we shall blend
The strength of pine and palm!
Call up the clashing elements around
And test the right and wrong!
On one side creeds that dare to preach
What Christ and Paul refused to teach----"

"Oh!" she broke off with a sharp intake of breath; "Do they believe
such things of us in the South, Celia?"

The pink fire deepened in Celia Craig's cheeks; her lips unclosed,

tightened, as though a quick retort had been quickly reconsidered.

She meditated. Then: "Honey-bell," she said tranquilly, "if we are bitter, try to remember that we are a nation in pain."

"A _nation_!"

"Dear, we have always been that--only the No'th has just found it out. Charleston is telling her now. God give that our cannon need not repeat it."

"But, Celia, the cannon _can't_! The same flag belongs to us both."

"Not when it flies over Sumter, Honey-bird." There came a subtle ringing sound in Celia Craig's voice; she leaned forward, taking the newspaper from Ailsa's idle fingers:

"Try to be fair," she said in unsteady tones. "God knows I am not trying to teach you secession, but suppose the guns on Governor's Island were suddenly swung round and pointed at this street? Would you care ve'y much what flag happened to be flying over Castle William? Listen to another warning from this stainless poet of the South." She opened the newspaper feverishly, glanced quickly down the columns, and holding it high under the chandelier, read in a hushed but distinct voice, picking out a verse here and there at random:

"Calm as that second summer which precedes

The first fall of the snow,

In the broad sunlight of heroic deeds

A city bides her foe.

"As yet, behind high ramparts stem and proud

Where bolted thunders sleep,

Dark Sumter like a battlemented cloud

Towers o'er the solemn deep.

"But still along the dim Atlantic's line

The only hostile smoke

Creeps like a harmless mist above the brine

From some frail floating oak.

"And still through streets re-echoing with trade

Walk grave and thoughtful men

Whose hands may one day wield the patriot's blade

As lightly as the pen.

"And maidens, with such eyes as would grow dim

Over a wounded hound

Seem each one to have caught the strength of him

Whose sword-knot she hath hound.

"Thus, girt without and garrisoned at home,
Day patient following day,
Old Charleston looks from roof and spire and dome
Across her tranquil bay.

"Shall the spring dawn, and she, still clad in steel,
And with an unscathed brow,
Watch o'er a sea unvexed by hostile keel
As fair and free as now?

"We know not. In the Temples of the Fates
God has inscribed her doom;
And, all untroubled in her faith she waits
Her triumph or her tomb!"

The hushed charm of their mother's voice fascinated the children.
Troubled, uncertain, Ailsa rose, took a few irresolute steps toward
the extension where her brother-in-law still paced to and fro in
the darkness, the tip of his cigar aglow. Then she turned suddenly.

"_Can't_ you understand, Ailsa?" asked her sister-in-law wistfully.

"Celia--dearest," she stammered, "I simply can't understand. . . .
I thought the nation was greater than all----"

"The State is greater, dear. Good men will realise that when they see a sovereign people standing all alone for human truth and justice--standing with book and sword under God's favour, as sturdily as ever Israel stood in battle fo' the right!--I don't mean to be disloyal to my husband in saying this befo' my children. But you ask me, and I must tell the truth if I answer at all."

Slender, upright, transfigured with a flushed and girlish beauty wholly strange to them, she moved restlessly back and forth across the room, a slim, lovely, militant figure all aglow with inspiration, all aquiver with emotion too long and loyally suppressed.

Paige and Marye, astonished, watched her without a word. Ailsa stood with one hand resting on the mantel, a trifle pale but also silent, her startled eyes following this new incarnation wearing the familiar shape of Celia Craig.

"Ailsa!"

"Yes, dear."

"Can you think evil of a people who po' out their hearts in prayer and praise? Do traitors importune fo' blessings?"

She turned nervously to the piano and struck a ringing chord,
another--and dropped to the chair, head bowed on her slim childish
neck. Presently there stole through the silence a tremulous voice
intoning the "Libera Nos," with its strange refrain:

"_A furore Normanorum Libera nos, O Domme_!" Then, head raised, the
gas-light flashing on her dull-gold hair, her voice poured forth
all that was swelling and swelling up in her bruised and stifled
heart:

"God of our fathers! King of Kings!
Lord of the earth and sea!
With hearts repentant and sincere
We turn in need to thee."

She saw neither her children nor her husband nor Ailsa now, where
they gathered silently beside her. And she sang on:

"In the name of God! Amen!
Stand for our Southern rights;
On our side. Southern men,
The God of Battles fights!
Fling the invader far--
Hurl back his work of woe--

His voice is the voice of a brother,
But his hands are the hands of a foe.
By the blood which cries to Heaven.
Crimson upon our sod
Stand, Southrons, fight and conquer
In the Name of the Living God!"

Like receding battle echoes the chords, clashing distantly, died
away.

If she heard her husband turn, enter the hallway, and unbolt the
door, she made no sign. Ailsa, beside her, stooped and passed one
arm around her.

"You--are not crying, are you, Celia, darling?" she whispered.

Her sister-in-law, lashes wet, rose with decision.

"I think that I have made a goose of myse'f to-night. Marye, will
you say to your father that it is after eleven o'clock, and that I
am waiting to be well scolded and sent to bed?"

"Father went out a few moments ago," said Paige in an awed voice.

"I heard him unbolt the front door."

Ailsa turned and walked swiftly out into the hallway; the front door swung wide; Mr. Craig stood on the steps wearing his hat. He looked around as she touched his arm.

"Oh, is it you, Ailsa?" There was a moment's indecision. Through it, once more, far away in the city The Voices became audible again, distant, vague, incessant.

"I thought--if it is actually an extra--" he began carelessly and hesitated; and she said:

"Let me go with you. Wait. I'll speak to Celia."

"Say to her that I'll be gone only a moment."

When Ailsa returned she slipped her arm through his and they descended the steps and walked toward Fulton Avenue. The Voices were still distant; a few people, passing swiftly through the dusk, preceded them. Far down the vista of the lighted avenue dark figures crossed and recrossed the street, silhouetted against the gas-lights; some were running. A man called out something as they passed him. Suddenly, right ahead in the darkness, they encountered people gathered before the boarded fence of a vacant lot, a silent crowd shouldering, pushing, surging back and forth,

swarming far out along the dimly lighted avenue.

"There's a bulletin posted there," whispered Ailsa. "Could you lift me in your arms?"

Her brother-in-law stooped, clasped her knees, and lifted her high up above the sea of heads. Kerosene torches flickered beyond, flanking a poster on which was printed in big black letters:

"WASHINGTON, April 13, 1861, 6 A.M.

"At half-past four o'clock this morning fire was opened on Fort Sumter by the rebel batteries in the harbour. Major Anderson is replying with his barbette guns."

"8 A.M.

"A private despatch to the N. Y. Herald says that the batteries on Mount Pleasant have opened on Sumter. Major Anderson has brought into action two tiers of guns trained on Fort Moultrie and the Iron Battery."

"3 P.M.

"The fire at this hour is very heavy. Nineteen batteries are bombarding Sumter. The fort replies briskly. The excitement in Charleston is intense."

"LATER.

"Heavy rain storm. Firing resumed this evening.

The mortar batteries throw a shell into the fort every twenty minutes. The fort replies at intervals."

"LATEST.

"The fort is still replying. Major Anderson has signalled the fleet outside."

All this she read aloud, one hand resting on Craig's shoulder as he held her aloft above the throng. Men crowding around and striving to see, paused, with up-turned faces, listening to the emotionless young voice. There was no shouting, no sound save the trample and shuffle of feet; scarcely a voice raised, scarcely an exclamation.

As Craig lowered her to the pavement, a man making his way out said to them:

"Well, I guess that ends it."

Somebody replied quietly: "I guess that _begins_ it."

Farther down the avenue toward the City Hall where the new marble

court house was being built, a red glare quivered incessantly against the darkness; distant hoarse rumours penetrated the night air, accented every moment by the sharper clamour of voices calling the _Herald's_ extras.

"Curt?"

"Yes, dear."

"If he surrenders----"

"It makes no difference what he does now, child."

"I know it. . . . They've dishonoured the flag. This is war, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Will it be a long war?"

"I think not."

"Who will go?"

"I don't know. . . . Soldiers."

"I didn't suppose we had enough. Where are we going to get more?"

"The people--" he said absently--"everybody, I suppose. How do I know, child?"

"Just ordinary people?"

"Just ordinary people," he responded quietly. A few minutes later as they entered their own street he said:

"I suppose I had better tell my wife about this to-night. I don't know--it will be in the morning papers; but I think I had better break it to her to-night."

"She will have to know--sometime--of course----"

Halting at the foot of the stoop he turned and peered through his glasses at his sister-in-law.

"I don't want Stephen to start any nonsense about going."

"Going where?" she asked innocently.

He hesitated: "I don't want to hear any talk from him about enlisting. That is what I mean. Your influence counts with him more deeply than you know. Remember that."

"Steve--_enlist_!" she repeated blankly.

She could not yet comprehend what all this had to do with people she personally knew--with her own kin.

"He must not enlist, of course," she said curtly. "There are plenty of soldiers--there will be plenty, of course. I----"

Something silenced her, something within her sealed her lips. She stood in silence while Craig fitted his night-key, then entered the house with him. Gas burned low in the hall globes; when he turned it off a fainter light from above guided them.

"Celia, is that you?" she called gently,

"Hush; go to bed, Honey-bell. Everybody is asleep. How pale you are, Curt--dearest--dearest----"

The rear room was Ailsa's; she walked into it and dropped down on the bed in the darkness. The door between the rooms closed: she sat perfectly still, her eyes were wide open, staring in front of her.

Queer little luminous shapes danced through obscurity like the names from the kerosene torches around the bulletin; her ears still vibrated with the hoarse alarm of the voices; through her brain sounded her brother-in-law's words about Steve, repeated incessantly, stupidly.

Presently she began to undress by sense of touch. The gas in the bathroom was lighted; she completed her ablutions, turned it off, and felt her way back to the bed.

Lying there she became aware of sounds from the front room. Celia was still awake; she distinguished her voice in quick, frightened exclamation; then the low murmur continued for a while, then silence fell.

She raised herself on one elbow; the crack of light under the door was gone; there was no sound, no movement in the house except the measured tick of the hall clock outside,
tic-toc!--tic-toc!--tic-toc!

And she had been lying there a long, long while, eyes open, before she realised that the rhythm of the hall clock was but a repetition of a name which did not concern her in any manner:

"Berk-ley!--Berk-ley!--Berk-ley!"

How it had crept into her consciousness she could not understand; she lay still, listening, but the tic-toc seemed to fit the syllables of his name; and when, annoyed, she made a half disdainful mental attempt to substitute other syllables, it proved too much of an effort, and back into its sober, swinging rhythm slipped the old clock's tic-toe, in wearisome, meaningless repetition:

"Berk-ley!--Berk-ley!--Berk-ley!"

She was awakened by a rapping at her door and her cousin's imperative voice:

"I want to talk to you; are you in bed?"

She drew the coverlet to her chin and called out:

"Come in, Steve!"

He came, tremendously excited, clutching the Herald in one hand.

"I've had enough of this rebel newspaper!" he said fiercely. "I don't want it in the house again, ever. Father says that the marine news makes it worth taking, but----"

"What on earth are you trying to say, Steve?"

"I'm trying to tell you that we're at war! War, Ailsa! Do you understand? Father and I've had a fight already----"

"What?"

"They're still firing on Sumter, I tell you, and if the fort doesn't hold out do you think I'm going to sit around the house like a pussy cat? Do you think I'm going to business every day as though nothing was happening to the country I'm living in? I tell you now--you and mother and father--that I'm not built that way----"

Ailsa rose in bed, snatched the paper from his grasp, and leaning on one arm gazed down at the flaring head-lines:

THE WAR BEGUN

Very Exciting News from Charleston

Bombardment of Fort Sumter Commenced

Terrible Fire from the Secessionists' Batteries

Brilliant Defence of Maj. Anderson

Reckless Bravery of the Confederate States Troops.

And, scanning it to the end, cried out:

"He hasn't hauled down his flag! What are you so excited about?"

"I--I'm excited, of course! He can't possibly hold out with only eighty men and nothing to feed them on. Something's got to be done!" he added, walking up and down the room. "I've made fun of the militia--like everybody else--but Jimmy Lent is getting ready, and I'm doing nothing! Do you hear what I'm saying, Ailsa?"

She looked up from the newspaper, sitting there cross-legged under the coverlet.

"I hear you, Steve. I don't know what you mean by 'something's got to be done.' Major Anderson is doing what he can--bless him!"

"That's all right, but the thing isn't going to stop there."

"Stop where?"

"At Sumter. They'll begin firing on Fortress Monroe and Pensacola--I--how do you know they're not already thinking about bombarding Washington? Virginia is going out of the Union; the entire South is out, or going. Yesterday, I didn't suppose there was any use in trying to get them back again. Father did, but I didn't. I think it's got to be done, now. And the question is, Ailsa, whose going to do it?"

But she was fiercely absorbed again in the news, leaning close over the paper, tumbled dull-gold hair falling around her bare shoulders, breath coming faster and more irregularly as she read the incredible story and strove to comprehend its cataclysmic significance.

"If others are going, I am," repeated her cousin sullenly.

"Going where, Steve?--Oh-----"

She dropped the paper and looked up, startled; and he looked back at her, defiant, without a flicker in those characteristic family eyes of his, clear as azure, steady to punishment given or taken--good eyes for a boy to inherit. And he inherited them from his rebel mother.

"Father can't keep me home if other people go," he said.

"Wait until other people go." She reached out and laid a hand on his arm.

"Things are happening too fast, Steve, too fast for everybody to quite understand just yet. Everybody will do what is the thing to do; the family will do what it ought to. . . . Has your mother seen this?"

"Yes. Neither she nor father have dared speak about it before us--" He made a gesture of quick despair, walked to the window and back.

"It's a terrible thing, Ailsa, to have mother feel as she does."

"How could she feel otherwise?"

"I've done my best to explain to her----"

"O Steve! _You_!--when it's a matter between her soul and God!"

He said, reddening: "It's a matter of common-sense--I don't mean to insult mother--but--good Lord, a nation is a nation, but a state is only a state! I--hang it all--what's the use of trying to explain what is born in one----"

"The contrary was born in your mother, Steve. Don't ever talk to her this way. And--go out, please, I wish to dress."

He went away, saying over his shoulders: "I only wanted to tell you that I'm not inclined to sit sucking my thumb if other men go, and you can say so to father, who has forbidden me to mention the subject to him again until I have his permission."

But he went away to business that morning with his father, as usual; and when evening came the two men returned, anxious, dead tired, having passed most of the day standing in the dense throngs that choked every street around the bulletin boards of the

newspaper offices.

Ailsa had not been out during the day, nor had Mrs. Craig, except for an hour's drive in the family coupe around the district where preliminary surveys for the new Prospect Park were being pushed.

They had driven for almost an hour in utter silence. Her sister-in-law's hand lay clasped in hers, but both looked from the carriage windows without speaking, and the return from the drive found them strangely weary and inclined for the quiet of their own rooms. But Celia Craig could not close her eyes even to feign sleep to herself.

When husband and son returned at evening, she asked nothing of the news from them, but her upturned face lingered a second or two longer as her husband kissed her, and she clung a little to Stephen, who was inclined to be brief with her.

Dinner was a miserable failure in that family, which usually had much to compare, much to impart, much badinage and laughter to distribute. But the men were weary and uncommunicative; Estcourt Craig went to his club after dinner; Stephen, now possessing a latch-key, disappeared shortly afterward.

Paige and Marye did embroidery and gossiped together under the big

crystal chandelier while their mother read aloud to them from "Great Expectations," which was running serially in _Harper's Weekly_. Later she read in her prayer-book; later still, fully dressed, she lay across the bed in the alcove staring at the darkness and listening for the sound of her husband's latch-key in the front door,

When it sounded, she sprang up and hastily dried her eyes.

"The children and Ailsa are all abed, Curt. How late you are! It was not very wise of you to go out--being so tired--" She was hovering near him as though to help his weariness with her small offices; she took his hat, stood looking at him, then stepped nearer, laying both hands on his shoulders, and her face against his.

"I am--already tired of the--war," she sighed. "Is it ended yet, Curt?"

"There is no more news from Sumter."

"You will--love me--best--anyway. Curt--won't you?"

"Do you doubt it?"

She only drew a deep, frightened breath. For within her heart she felt the weight of the new apprehension--the clairvoyant premonition of a rival that she must prepare to encounter--a rival that menaced her peace of mind--a shape, shadowy as yet, but terrible, slowly becoming frightfully denned--a Thing that might one day wean this man from her--husband, and son, too--both perhaps----.

"Curt," she faltered, "it will all come right in the end. Say it. I am afraid."

"It will come out all right," he said gently. They kissed, and she turned to the mirror and silently began preparing for the night.

With the calm notes of church bells floating out across the city, and an April breeze blowing her lace curtains, Ailsa awoke. Overhead she heard the trample of Stephen's feet as he moved leisurely about his bedroom. Outside her windows in the backyard, early sunshine slanted across shrub and grass and white-washed fence; the Sunday quiet was absolute, save for the church bells.

She lay there listening and thinking; the church bells ceased; and after a while, lying there, she began to realise that the silence was unnatural--became conscious of something ominous in the intense quiet outside--a far-spread stillness which was more than the hush

of Sabbath.

Whether or not the household was still abed she did not know; no sound came from Celia's room; nor were Marye and Paige stirring on the floor above when she rose and stole out barefooted to the landing, holding a thin silk chamber robe around her. She paused, listening; the tic-toc of the hall clock accented the silence; the door that led from Celia's chamber into the hall stood wide open, and there was nobody in sight. Something drew her to the alcove window, which was raised; through the lace curtains she saw the staff of the family flag set in its iron socket at right angles to the facade--saw the silken folds stirring lazily in the sunshine, tiptoed to the window and peered out.

As far as her eyes could see, east and west, the street was one rustling mass of flags.

For a second her heart almost hurt her with its thrilling leap; she caught her breath; the hard tension in her throat was choking her; she dropped to her knees by the sill, drew a corner of the flag to her, and laid her cheek against it.

Her eyes unclosed and she gazed out upon the world of flags; then, upright, she opened her fingers, and the crinkled edges of the flag, released, floated leisurely out once more into the April sunshine.

When she had dressed she found the family in the dining-room--her sister-in-law, serene but pale, seated behind the coffee urn, Mr. Craig and Stephen reading the Sunday newspapers, Paige and Marye whispering together over their oatmeal and cream.

She kissed Celia, dropped the old-fashioned, half-forgotten curtsy to the others, and stood hesitating a moment, one hand resting on Celia's shoulder.

"Is the fort holding out?" she asked.

Stephen looked up angrily, made as though to speak, but a deep flush settled to the roots of his hair and he remained silent.

"Fort Sumter has surrendered," said her brother-in-law quietly.

Celia whispered: "Take your seat now, Honey-bell; your breakfast is getting cold."

At church that Sunday the Northern clergy prayed in a dazed sort of way for the Union and for the President; some addressed the Most High as "The God of Battles." The sun shone brightly; new leaves were startling on every tree in every Northern city; acres of

starry banners drooped above thousands of departing congregations,
and formed whispering canopies overhead.

Vespers were solemn; April dusk fell over a million roofs and
spires; twinkling gas jets were lighted in street lamps; city,
town, and hamlet drew their curtains and bowed their heads in
darkness. A dreadful silence fell over the North--a stillness that
breeds epochs and the makers of them.

But the first gray pallor of the dawn awoke a nation for the first
time certain of its entity, roaring its comprehension of it from
the Lakes to the Potomac, from sea to sea; and the red sun rose
over twenty States in solid battle line thundering their loyalty to
a Union undivided,

And on that day rang out the first loud call to arms; and the first
battalion of the Northland, seventy-five thousand strong, formed
ranks, cheering their insulted flag.

Then, southward, another flag shot up above the horizon. The world
already knew it as The Stars and Bars. And, beside it, from its
pointed lance, whipped and snapped and fretted another
flag--square, red, crossed by a blue saltier edged with white on
which glittered thirteen stars.

It was the battle flag of the Confederacy flashing the answer to the Northern cheer.

CHAPTER V

"Burgess!"

"Sir?"

Berkley sat up in bed and viewed his environment with disgust.

"These new lodgings would make a fair kennel, wouldn't they, Burgess?--if a man isn't too particular about his dog."

The servant entered with a nasty smirk. "Yes, sir; I seen a rat last night."

"He's not the only one, is he, Burgess," yawned Berkley. "Oh, hell! I've got to dress. Did you paint that bathtub? I guess you did, the place reeks like a paint shop. Anyway, it kills less desirable aromas. Where's the water?"

He swung his symmetrical body to the bed's edge, dropped lightly to the carpet, unloosed his night robe, and stretched himself.

"Was I very drunk, Burgess?"

"No, sir; you just went to sleep. You haven't got no headache, have you?"

"No--but it was only corn whisky. I didn't remember what I did with it. Is there any left?"

"Not much, sir."

The servant, ugly to the verge of deformity, and wearing invariably the abominable smirk that disgusted others but amused Berkley, went about his duties.

Berkley blinked at him reflectively, then bathed, dressed, and sat down to a bowl of chocolate and a bit of bread.

"What the devil was all that row this morning, Burgess?"

"War, sir. The President has called for seventy-five thousand men. Here it is, sir." And he laid a morning paper beside the cup of chocolate, which Berkley studied between sips, commenting occasionally aloud:

"Heavens, Burgess, why, we're a race of patriots! Now who on earth could have suspected that. . . . Why, we seem to be heroes, too! What do you think of that, Burgess? You're a hero; I'm a hero; everybody north of Charleston is an embattled citizen or a hero! Isn't it funny that nobody realised all this before?" . . . He turned the paper leisurely sipping his chocolate. . . . "_Of_ course--the 'dear old flag!' That's the cheese, isn't it, Burgess? Been insulted, hasn't it? And we're all going to Charleston to punch that wicked Beauregard in the nose. . . . Burgess, you and I are neglecting our duty as heroes; there's much shouting to be done yet, much yelling in the streets, much arguing to be done, many, many cocktails to be firmly and uncompromisingly swallowed. Are you prepared to face the serious consequences of being a hero?"

"Yes, sir," said Burgess.

"You merit well of the republic! The country needs you. Here's half a dollar. Do your duty unflinchingly--at the nearest bar!"

Burgess took the coin with a smirk.

"Mr. Berkley, the landlady sent word that times is hard."

"Bless her soul! They are hard, Burgess. Inform her of my

sentiments," said Berkley cordially. "Now, my hat and cane, if you please. We're a wonderful people, Burgess; we'll beat our walking-sticks into bayonets if Mr. Beauregard insists on saying boo to us too many times in succession. . . . And, Burgess?"

"Sir?"

"Now that you have waked up this morning to find yourself a hero, I think you'd better find yourself another and more spectacular master. My heroism, for the future, is to be more or less inconspicuous; in fact, I begin the campaign by inserting my own studs and cleaning my own clothes, and keeping out of gaol; and the sooner I go where that kind of glory calls me the sooner my name will be emblazoned in the bright lexicon of youth where there's no such word as 'jail.'",

"Sir?"

"In simpler and more archaic phrase, I can't afford you, Burgess, unless I pilfer for a living."

"I don't eat much, sir."

"No, you don't _eat_ much."

"I could quit drinking, sir."

"_That_ is really touching, Burgess. This alcohol pickled integument of yours covers a trusting heart. But it won't do. Heroics in a hall bedroom cut no coupons, my poor friend. Our paths to glory and the grave part just outside the door-sill yonder."

"_She_ said I could stay, sir."

"Which _she_?"

"The landlady. I'm to fetch coal and run errants and wait on table. But you'll get the best cuts, sir. And after hours I can see to your clothes and linen and boots and hats, and do your errants same like the usual."

"Now this is nearly as pathetic as our best fiction," said Berkley; "ruined master, faithful man--_won't_ leave--starves slowly at his master's feet--tootle music very sneaky--'transformation! Burgess in heaven, blinking, puzzled, stretching one wing, reflectively scratching his halo with right hind foot. Angel chorus. Burgess appears to enjoy it and lights one of my best cigars----"

"Sir?" said Burgess, very red.

Berkley swung around, levelled his walking-stick, and indicated the pit of his servant's stomach:

"Your face is talking now; wait till that begins to yell. It will take more than I'm earning to fill it."

He stood a moment, smiling, curious. Then:

"You've been as faithless a valet as any servant who ever watered wine, lost a gimcrack, or hooked a weed. Studs, neckcloths, bootjacks, silk socks, pins, underwear--all magically and eventually faded from my wardrobe, wafted to those silent bournes of swag that valets wot of. What in hell do you want to stay here for now, you amusing wastrel?"

"Yes, sir. I'd prefer to stay with you."

"But there'll be no more pleasant pickings, my poor and faithless steward! If you should convert anything more to your own bank account I'll be obliged to stroll about naked."

"Yes, sir," muttered Burgess; "I brought back some things last

night--them socks, shirt-pins and studs, and the fob. . . . Yes, sir; I fetched 'em back, I did--" A sudden and curious gleam of pride crossed the smirk for an instant;--"I guess my gentleman ain't agoing to _look_ no worse than the next Fifth Avenue swell he meets--even if he ain't et no devilled kidneys for breakfast and he don't dine on no canvas-back at Delmonico's. No, sir."

Berkley sat down on the bed's edge and laughed until he could scarcely see the man, who observed him in patient annoyance. And every time Berkley looked at him he went into another fit of uncontrollable laughter, as he realised the one delightful weakness in this thorough-paced rogue--pride in the lustre cast upon himself by the immaculate appearance of a fashionable master. But after reflection, it did not astonish him too much; the besetting weakness of rogues is vanity in one form or another. This happened to be an unusual form.

"Burgess," he said, "I don't care how you go to hell. Go with me if you like or go it alone."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're welcome," replied Berkley gravely, and, tucking his cane up under one arm, he went out to business, drawing on a pair of lemon-coloured kid gloves.

Later he searched his pockets for the cigar he had denied himself the evening before. It was not there. In fact, at that moment, Burgess, in the boarding-house backyard, was promenading up and down, leering at the Swedish scullion, and enjoying the last expensive cigar that his master was likely to purchase in many a day.

The street, and avenue were seething with people; people stood at their windows looking out at the news-boys who swarmed everywhere, shouting endless extras; people were gathering on corners, in squares, along park railings, under porticos of hotels, and every one of them had a newspaper and was reading.

In front of the St. Nicholas Hotel a lank and shabby man had mounted a cracker box, and was evidently making a speech, but Berkley could distinguish nothing he said because of the wild cheering.

Everywhere, threading the throng, hurried boys and men selling miniature flags, red-white-and-blue rosettes, and tricoloured cockades; and everybody was purchasing the national colours--the passing crowd had already become bright with badges; the Union colours floated in streamers from the throats or sleeves of pretty girls, glinted in the lapels of dignified old gentlemen, decorated the hats of the stage-drivers and the blinders of their horses.

"Certainly," said Berkley, buying a badge and pinning it in his button-hole. "Being a hero, I require the trade-mark. Kindly permit that I offer a suggestion--" a number of people waiting to buy badges; were now listening to him--"those gentlemen gathered there in front of the New York Hotel seem to be without these marks which distinguish heroes from citizens. No doubt they'll be delighted to avail themselves of your offered cockades."

A quick laugh broke out from those around, but there was an undertone of menace in it, because the undecorated gentlemen in front of the New York Hotel were probably Southerners, and Secessionists in principles; that hostelry being the rendezvous in New York of everything Southern.

So, having bestowed his mischievous advice, Berkley strolled on down Broadway, his destination being the offices of Craig and Son, City and Country Real Estate, where he had a desk to himself, a client or two in prospect, and considerable leisure to study the street, gas, and sewer maps of New York City.

Tiring of this distraction, he was always at liberty to twiddle his thumbs, twirl his pencil, yawn, blink, and look out of the window at the City Park across the way, where excited citizens maintained a steady yelling monotone before the neighbouring newspaper offices all day long.

He was also free to reflect upon his own personal shortcomings, a speculation perhaps less damaging than the recent one he had indulged in; and he thought about it sometimes; and sometimes about Ailsa Paige, whom he had not again seen since the unaccountable madness had driven him to trample and destroy the first real inclination he had ever had for a woman.

This inclination he occasionally found leisure to analyse, but, not understanding it, never got very far, except that, superficially, it had been more or less physical. From the moment he saw her he was conscious that she was different; insensibly the exquisitely volatile charm of her enveloped him, and he betrayed it, awaking her, first, to uneasy self-consciousness; then uneasy consciousness of him; then, imperceptibly, through distrust, alarm, and a thousand inexplicable psychological emotions, to a wistful interest that faintly responded to his. Ah! that response!--strange, childish, ignorant, restless--but still a response; and from obscure shallows unsuspected, uncomprehended--shallows that had never before warned her with the echo of an evanescent ripple.

For him to have reflected, reasoned, halted himself, had been useless from the beginning. The sister-in-law of this girl knew who and what he was and had been. There was no hope for him. To let himself drift; to evoke in her, sometimes by hazard, at times with intent, the delicate response--faint echo--pale shadow of the

virile emotions she evoked in him, that, too, was useless. He knew it, yet curious to try, intent on developing communication through those exquisite and impalpable lines that threaded the mystery from him to her--from her to him.

And then, when the mystery all about them was aquiver, and her vague eyes met his through the magic, acquiescent under a sorcery for which she had no name--then, when all things occult breathed silence--then he had said too much!

It was perhaps as well that he had said it then as later--as well perhaps that, losing self-control, defeat had moved his tongue to boast, had fixed the empty eye and stamped the smile he wore with a confidence dead in him for ever.

He had said that he would come back. He knew that he would not.

It was the pitiful defiance of a boaster hopelessly hurt.

He no longer desired to see her again. Never again would he risk enduring what she had evoked in him, whatever it was of good or of evil, of the spiritual or the impure--he did not know he was aware only of what his eyes had beheld and his heart had begun to desire.

On his way back from the office that evening he met Camilla Lent

and her uncle, the Captain, and would have passed with an amiable salute, but the girl evinced a decided desire to speak. So he turned and joined them.

"How do you do, Camilla? How are you, Captain Lent? This re-conversion of the nation's ploughshares and pruning hooks is a noisy affair, isn't it?"

"April 18th, 1861!" replied the Captain quickly. "What you hear, sir, is the attrition consequent upon the grinding together of certain millstones belonging to the gods."

"I have no doubt of it, Captain Lent; they'll probably make meal of us all. Are you offering your services, sir."

Camilla said quickly, and with gayest confidence: "Uncle has been looking about casually. There are so many regiments forming, so many recruiting stations that we--we haven't decided--have we, uncle?" And she gave Berkley a wistful, harrowing glance that enlightened him.

He said gravely: "I suppose the average age of these volunteers will be about eighteen. And if the militia go, too, it will be comforting for a defenceless city to know she has men of your experience to count on, Captain Lent."

"_I_ am going to the front," observed the Captain.

"There may be much to be done in New York, sir."

"Then let the police do it," said Captain Lent calmly. "The Union must and shall be preserved. If any man attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him upon the spot. Et cetera, sir, et cetera."

"Certainly. But it's a question of niggers, too, I believe."

"No, sir. It is not a question of niggers. It is a question of who's at the wheel, Union or State. I myself never had any doubts any more than I ever doubted the Unitarian faith! So it is no question for me, sir. What bothers me is to pick out the regiment most likely to be sent first."

"We've walked our legs off," said Camilla, aside, "and we've been in all kinds of frightful places where men are drilling and smoking and swearing and yelling; and I was dreadfully afraid a gun would go off or somebody would be impudent to uncle. The dear old thing," she whispered, "he is perfectly sure they want him and that he has only to choose a regiment and offer his sword. Oh, dear! I'm beginning to be terribly unhappy--I'm afraid they won't let him go and I'm deadly afraid they might! And I'm sure that Jim means

to go. Oh, dear! Have you seen Ailsa Paige lately?"

"No. . . . I hope she is quite well."

"You are not very enthusiastic."

"I have every reason to be. She is a very winsome girl."

"She's a dear. . . . She has spoken of you several times."

"That is most amiable of her, and of you to say so."

"Oh, very," laughed Camilla, tossing her pretty head, "but it evidently does not interest you very much. In fact--" she glanced sidewise--"it is understood that no woman ever interests you for more than forty-eight consecutive hours."

"Pure slander, Camilla. You do."

"Oh--not in the way I mean."

"Well, but you don't expect me to be interested in Mrs. Paige--in the way you mean do you?"

"Why not?" she asked mischievously.

"Because, to begin properly, Mrs. Paige is not likely ever to become interested in me."

"I am heartily glad of it," retorted Camilla. "You'd forget her in a week,"

"That's more than forty-eight hours," he said, laughing. "You're flattering me now."

"Anyway," said Camilla, "I don't see why everybody that knows her isn't mad about Ailsa Paige. She has such high principles, such ideals, such wonderful aspirations--" She clasped her hands sentimentally: "At times, Phil, she seems too ethereal, scarcely of earth--and yet I breakfasted with her and she ate twice as much as I did. How does she keep that glorious figure!"

Plumpness was the bane and terror of Camilla's life. Her smooth, suave white skin was glossy and tight; distracting curves, entrancing contours characterised her now; but her full red lips fairly trembled as she gazed at her parents' portraits in her bedroom, for they had both been of a florid texture and full habit; and she had now long refused sugar and the comforts of sweetmeats

dear to the palate of her age and sex. And mostly was this self-denial practised for the sake of a young and unobservant friend, one Stephen Craig, who had so far evinced no unusual inclination for her, or for anything except cigars and masculine society of his own age and condition.

She managed to get Philip Berkley to talk about Stephen, which ingenuity soothed her. But Philip was becoming bored, and he presently escaped to retrace his steps up Broadway, up Fifth Avenue, and then west to the exceedingly modest lodgings whither fate and misfortune had wafted him.

On the way he passed Colonel Arran's big double house with a sullen and sidelong scowl, and continued onward with a shrug. But he smiled no more to himself.

Burgess was in the room, cross-legged on the floor, ironing out his master's best coat.

"What the devil are you about," said Philip ungraciously. "Get up. I need what floor I've got to stand on."

Burgess obediently laid the board and the coat on a trunk and continued ironing; and Philip scowled at him askance.

"Why don't you enlist?" he said. "Every car-driver, stage-driver, hackman, and racing-tout can become major-generals if they yell loud enough."

Burgess continued ironing, then stole a glance at his master.

"Are you thinking of enlisting, sir?"

"No; I can't pass the examination for lung power. By the way," he added, laughing, "I overlooked the impudence of your question, too. But now is your time, Burgess. If I wanted you I'd have to put up with your insolence, I suppose."

"But you don't want me, sir."

"Which restrains you," said Philip, laughing. "Oh, go on, my friend. Don't say 'sir' to me; it's a badge of servitude pasted onto the vernacular. Say 'Hi!' if you like."

"Sir?"

"Hell! I say don't behave like a servant to me."

"I _am_ a servant, sir."

"You're not mine."

"Yes, sir, I am. Will you wear this coat this evening, sir?"

"God knows," said the young fellow, sitting down and gazing about at the melancholy poverty of the place. . . . "Is there any of that corn whisky?"

"No, sir."

"Damn it, you said there was this morning!"

"No, sir, I didn't."

The man lied placidly; the master looked at him, then laughed.

"Poor old Burgess," he said aloud as though to himself; "there wasn't a skinful in that bottle. Well, I can't get drunk, I can't lie here and count from six to midnight and keep my sanity, I can't smoke--you rascal, where's my cigar? And I certainly can't go out anywhere because I haven't any money."

"You might take the air on the avenue, sir. Your clothes are in order."

"Poor Burgess! That was your amusement, wasn't it?--to see me go out discreetly perfumed, in fine linen and purple, brave as the best of them in club and hall, in ballroom and supper room, and in every lesser hell from Crystal Palace cinders to Canal.

"Poor Burgess! Even the seventy-five pretty waitresses at the Gaities would turn up their seventy-five retrousse noses at a man with pockets as empty as mine."

"Your clothes are fashionable. So is your figger, sir."

"That settles it?" protested the young fellow, weak with laughter.

"Burgess, don't go! Don't ever go! I do need you. Oh I do want you, Burgess. Because there never will be anybody exactly like you, and I've only one life in which to observe you, study you, and mentally digest you. You won't go, will you?"

"No sir," said Burgess with dignity.

CHAPTER VI

There was incipient demoralisation already in the offices of Craig & Son. Young gentlemen perched on high benches still searched city maps and explored high-way and by-way with compass and pencil-point, but their ears were alert to every shout from the streets, and their interest remained centred in the newspaper bulletins across the way, where excited crowds clamoured for details not forthcoming.

All day, just outside the glass doors of the office, Broadway streamed with people; and here, where the human counter currents running north and south encountered amid the racket of omnibuses, carts, carriages, and drays, a vast overflow spread turbulently, eddying out around the recruiting stations and newspaper offices which faced the City Park.

Sidewalks swarmed, the park was packed solid. Overhead flags flew from every flag pole, over every portal, across every alley and street and square--big nags, little flags, flags of silk, of cotton, of linen, of bunting, all waving wide in the spring sunshine, or hanging like great drenched flowers in the winnowing April rain.

And it was very hard for the young gentlemen in the offices of Craig & Son to keep their minds on their business.

Berkley had a small room to himself, a chair, a desk, a city map suspended against the wall, and no clients. Such occasional commissions as Craig & Son were able to give him constituted his sole source of income.

He also had every variety of time on his hands--leisure to walk to the window and walk back again, and then walk all around the room--leisure to go out and solicit business in a city where already business was on the edge of chaos and still sliding--leisure to sit for hours in his chair and reflect upon anything he chose--leisure to be hungry and satisfy the inclination with philosophy. He was perfectly at liberty to choose any subject and think about it. But he spent most of his time in trying to prevent himself from thinking.

However, from his window, the street views now were usually interesting; he was an unconvinced spectator of the mob which started for the Daily News office, hissing, cat-calling, yelling: "Show your colours!" "Run up your colours!" He saw the mob visit the Journal of Commerce, and then turn on the Herald, yelling insult and bellowing threats which promptly inspired that journal to execute a political flip-flap that set the entire city smiling.

Stephen, who had conceived a younger man's furtive admiration for Berkley and his rumoured misdemeanours, often came into his room when opportunity offered. That morning he chanced in for a moment

and found Berkley at the window chewing the end of a pencil, perhaps in lieu of the cigar he could no longer afford.

"These are spectacular times," observed the latter, with a gesture toward the street below. "Observe yonder ladylike warrior in brand-new regimentals. Apparently, Stephen, he's a votary of Mars and pants for carnage; but in reality he continues to remain the sartorial artist whose pants are more politely emitted. He emitted these--" patting his trousers with a ruler. "On what goose has this my tailor fed that he hath grown so sightly!"

They stood watching the crowds, once brightened only by the red shirts of firemen or the blue and brass of a policeman, but now varied with weird uniforms, or parts of uniforms, constructed on every known and unknown pattern, military and unmilitary, foreign and domestic. The immortal army at Coventry was not more variegated.

"There's a new poster across the street," said Stephen. He indicated a big advertisement decorated with a flying eagle.

DOWN WITH SECESSION!

The Government Appeals to the
New York Fire Department for One Regiment of Zouaves!

Companies will select their own officers. The roll is
at Engine House 138, West Broadway.

ELSWORTH, COL: ZOUAVES.

"That's a good, regiment to enlist in, isn't it?" said the boy
restlessly.

"Cavalry for me," replied Berkley, unsmiling; "they can run faster."

"I'm serious," said Stephen. "If I had a chance--" He turned on
Berkley: "Why don't you, enlist? There's nothing to stop you, is
there?"

"Nothing except constitutional timidity."

"Then why don't you?"

Berkley laughed. "Well, for one thing, I'm not sure how I'd behave
in battle. I might be intelligent enough to run; I might be ass
enough to fight. The enemy would have to take its chances."

The boy laughed, too, turned to the window, and suddenly caught Berkley by the arm:

"Look! There's something going on down by the Astor House!"

"A Massachusetts regiment of embattled farmers arrived in this hamlet last night. I believe they are to pass by here on their way to Washington," remarked Berkley, opening the window and leaning out.

Already dense crowds of people were pushing, fighting, forcing their way past the windows, driven before double lines of police; already distant volleys of cheers sounded; the throb of drums became audible; the cheering sounded shriller, nearer.

Past the windows, through Broadway, hordes of ragged street arabs came running, scattered into night before another heavy escort of police. And now the on-coming drums could be heard more distinctly; and now two dusty officers marched into view, a colonel of Massachusetts infantry attended by a quartermaster of New York militia.

Behind them tramped the regimental band of the 6th Massachusetts, instruments slung; behind these, filling the street from gutter to gutter, surged the sweating drummers, deafening every ear with

their racket; then followed the field and staff, then the Yankee regiment, wave on wave of bayonets choking the thoroughfare far as the eye could see, until there seemed no end to their coming, and the cheering had become an unbroken howl.

Stephen turned to Berkley: "A fellow can't see too much of this kind of thing and stand it very long. Those soldiers are no older than I am!"

Berkley's ironical reply was drowned in a renewed uproar as the Massachusetts soldiers wheeled and began to file into the Astor House, and the New York militia of the escort swung past hurraing for the first Northern troops to leave for the front.

That day Berkley lunched in imagination only, seriously inclined to exchange his present board and lodgings for a dish of glory and a cot in barracks.

That evening, too, after a boarding-house banquet, and after Burgess had done his offices, he took the air instead of other and more expensive distraction; and tired of it thoroughly, and of the solitary silver coin remaining in his pocket.

From his clubs he had already resigned; other and less innocent haunts of his were no longer possible; some desirable people still

retained him on their lists, and their houses were probably open to him, but the social instinct was sick; he had no desire to go; no desire even to cross the river for a penny and look again on Ailsa Paige. So he had, as usual, the evening on his hands, nothing in his pockets, and a very weary heart, under a last year's evening coat. And his lodgings were becoming a horror to him; the landlady's cat had already killed two enormous rats in the hallway; also cabbage had been cooked in the kitchen that day. Which left him no other choice than to go out again and take more air.

Before midnight he had no longer any coin in his pockets, and he was not drunk yet. The situation seemed hopeless, and he found a policeman and inquired politely for the nearest recruiting station; but when he got there the station was closed, and his kicks on the door brought nobody but a prowling Bowery b'hoy, sullenly in quest of single combat. So Berkley, being at leisure, accommodated him, picked him up, propped him limply against a doorway, resumed his own hat and coat, and walked thoughtfully and unsteadily homeward, where he slept like an infant in spite of rats, cabbage, and a swollen lip.

Next day, however, matters were less cheerful. He had expected to realise a little money out of his last salable trinket--a diamond he had once taken for a debt. But it seemed that the stone couldn't pass muster, and he bestowed it upon Burgess, breakfasted on coffee and sour bread, and sauntered downtown quite undisturbed in the brilliant April sunshine.

However, the prospect of a small commission from Craig & Son buoyed up his natural cheerfulness. All the way downtown he nourished his cane; he hummed lively tunes in his office as he studied his maps and carefully read the real estate reports in the daily papers; and then he wrote another of the letters which he never mailed, strolled out to Stephen's desk for a little gossip, reported himself to Mr. Craig, and finally sallied forth to execute that gentleman's behest upon an upper Fifth Avenue squatter who had declined to vacate property recently dedicated to blasting, the Irish, and general excavation.

In a few moments he found himself involved in the usual crowd. The 8th Massachusetts regiment was passing in the wake of the 6th, its sister regiment of the day before, and the enthusiasm and noise were tremendous.

However, he extricated himself and went about his business; found the squatter, argued with the squatter, gracefully dodged a brick from the wife of the squatter, laid a laughing complaint before the proper authorities, and then banqueted in imagination. What a luncheon he had! He was becoming a Lucullus at mental feasts.

Later, his business affairs and his luncheon terminated, attempting to enter Broadway at Grand Street, he got into a crowd so rough and ungovernable that he couldn't get out of it--an unreasonable,

obstinate, struggling mass of men, women, and children so hysterical that the wild demonstrations of the day previous, and of the morning, seemed as nothing compared to this dense, far-spread riot.

Broadway from Fourth to Cortlandt Streets was one tossing mass of flags overhead; one mad surge of humanity below. Through it battalions of almost exhausted police relieved each other in attempting to keep the roadway clear for the passing of the New York 7th on its way to Washington.

Driven, crushed, hurled back by the played-out police, the crowds had sagged back into the cross streets. But even here the police charged them repeatedly, and the bewildered people turned struggling to escape, stumbled, swayed, became panic-stricken and lost their heads.

A Broadway stage, stranded in Canal Street, was besieged as a refuge. Toward it Berkley had been borne in spite of his efforts to extricate himself, incidentally losing his hat in the confusion. At the same moment he heard a quiet, unterrified voice pronounce his name, caught a glimpse of Ailsa Paige swept past on the human wave, set his shoulders, stemmed the rush from behind, and into the momentary eddy created, Ailsa was tossed, undismayed, laughing, and pinned flat against the forward wheel of the stalled stage.

"Climb up!" he said. "Place your right foot on the hub!--now the left on the tire!--now step on my shoulder!"

There came a brutal rush from behind; he braced his back to it; she set one foot on the hub, the other on the tire, stepped to his shoulder, swung herself aloft, and crept up over the roof of the stage. Here he joined her, offering an arm to steady her as the stage shook under the impact of the reeling masses below.

"How did you get into this mob?" he asked.

"I was caught," she said calmly, steadying herself by the arm he offered and glancing down at the peril below. "Celia and I were shopping in Grand Street at Lord and Taylor's, and I thought I'd step out of the shop for a moment to see if the 7th was coming, and I ventured too far--I simply could not get back. . . . And--thank you for helping me." She had entirely recovered her serenity; she released his arm and now stood cautiously balanced behind the driver's empty seat, looking curiously out over the turbulent sea of people, where already hundreds of newsboys were racing hither and thither shouting an afternoon extra, which seemed to excite everybody within hearing to frenzy.

"Can you hear what they are shouting?" she inquired. "It seems to make people very angry."

"They say that the 6th Massachusetts, which passed through here yesterday, was attacked by a mob in Baltimore."

"_Our_ soldiers!" she said, incredulous. Then, clenching her small hands: "If I were Colonel Lefferts of the 7th I'd march my men through Baltimore to-morrow!"

"I believe they expect to go through," he said, amused. "That is what they are for."

The rising uproar around was affecting her; the vivid colour in her lips and cheeks deepened. Berkley looked at her, at the cockade with its fluttering red-white-and-blue ribbons on her breast, at the clear, fearless eyes now brilliant with excitement and indignation.

"Have you thought of enlisting?" she asked abruptly, without glancing at him.

"Yes," he said, "I've ventured that far. It's perfectly safe to think about it. You have no idea, Mrs. Paige, what warlike sentiments I cautiously entertain in my office chair."

She turned nervously, with a sunny glint of gold hair and fluttering ribbons:

"Are you never perfectly serious, Mr. Berkley? Even at such a moment as this?"

"Always," he insisted. "I was only philosophising upon these scenes of inexpensive patriotism which fill even the most urbane and peaceful among us full of truculence. . . . I recently saw my tailor wearing a sword, attired in the made-to-measure panoply of battle."

"Did that strike you as humorous?"

"No, indeed; it fitted; I am only afraid he may find a soldier's grave before I can settle our sartorial accounts."

There was a levity to his pleasantries which sounded discordant to her amid the solemnly thrilling circumstances impending. For the flower of the city's soldiery was going forth to battle--a thousand gay, thoughtless young fellows summoned from ledger, office, and counting-house; and all about her a million of their neighbours had gathered to see them go.

"Applause makes patriots. Why should I enlist when merely by

cheering others I can stand here and create heroes in battalions?"

"I think," she said, "that there was once another scoffer who remained to pray."

As he did not answer, she sent a swift side glance at him, found him tranquilly surveying the crowd below where, at the corner of Canal and Broadway, half a dozen Zouaves, clothed in their characteristic and brilliant uniforms and wearing hairy knapsacks trussed up behind, were being vociferously acclaimed by the people as they passed, bayonets fixed.

"More heroes," he observed, "made immortal while you wait."

And now Ailsa became aware of a steady, sustained sound audible above the tumult around them; a sound like surf washing on a distant reef.

"Do you hear that? It's like the roar of the sea," she said. "I believe they're coming; I think I caught a strain of military music a moment ago!"

They rose on tiptoe, straining their ears; even the skylarking gamins who had occupied the stage top behind them, and the driver, who had reappeared, drunk, and resumed his reins and seat, stood up

to listen.

Above the noise of the cheering, rolling steadily toward them over the human ocean, came the deadened throbbing of drums. A far, thin strain of military music rose, was lost, rose again; the double thudding of the drums sounded nearer; the tempest of cheers became terrific. Through it, at intervals, they could catch the clear marching music of the 7th as two platoons of police, sixty strong, arrived, forcing their way into view, followed by a full company of Zouaves.

Then pandemonium broke loose as the matchless regiment swung into sight. The polished instruments of the musicians flashed in the sun; over the slanting drums the drumsticks rose and fell, but in the thundering cheers not a sound could be heard from brass or parchment.

Field and staff passed headed by the colonel; behind jolted two howitzers; behind them glittered the sabre-bayonets of the engineers; then, filling the roadway from sidewalk to sidewalk the perfect ranks of the infantry swept by under burnished bayonets.

They wore their familiar gray and black uniforms, forage caps, and blue overcoats, and carried knapsacks with heavy blankets rolled on top. And New York went mad.

What the Household troops are to England the 7th is to America. In its ranks it carries the best that New York has to offer. The polished metal gorgets of its officers reflect a past unstained; its pedigree stretches to the cannon smoke fringing the Revolution.

To America the 7th was always The Guard; and now, in the lurid obscurity of national disaster, where all things traditional were crashing down, where doubt, distrust, the agony of indecision turned government to ridicule and law to anarchy, there was no doubt, no indecision in The Guard. Above the terrible clamour of political confusion rolled the drums of the 7th steadily beating the assembly; out of the dust of catastrophe emerged its disciplined gray columns. Doubters no longer doubted, uncertainty became conviction; in a situation without a precedent, the precedent was established; the *_corps d'elite_* of all state soldiery was answering the national summons; and once more the associated states of North America understood that they were first of all a nation indivisible.

Down from window and balcony and roof, sifting among the bayonets, fluttered an unbroken shower of tokens--gloves, flowers, handkerchiefs, tricoloured bunches of ribbon; and here and there a bracelet or some gem-set chain fell flashing through the sun.

Ailsa Craig, like thousands of her sisters, tore the

red-white-and-blue rosette from her breast and flung it down among the bayonets with a tremulous little cheer.

Everywhere the crowd was breaking into the street; citizens marched with their hands on the shoulders of the soldiers; old gentlemen toddled along beside strapping sons; brothers passed arms around brothers; here and there a mother hung to the chevroned sleeve of son or husband who was striving to see ahead through blurring eyes; here and there some fair young girl, badged with the national colours, stretched out her arms from the crowd and laid her hands to the lips of her passing lover.

The last shining files of bayonets had passed; the city swarmed like an ant-hill.

Berkley's voice was in her ears, cool, good-humoured:

"Perhaps we had better try to find Mrs. Craig. I saw Stephen in the crowd, and he saw us, so I do not think your sister-in-law will be worried."

She nodded, suffered him to aid her in the descent to the sidewalk, then drew a deep, unsteady breath and gazed around as though awaking from a dream.

"It certainly was an impressive sight," he said. "The Government may thank me for a number of heroes. I'm really quite hoarse."

She made no comment.

"Even a thousand well-fed brokers in uniform are bound to be impressive," he meditated aloud.

Her face flushed; she walked on ignoring his flippancy, ignoring everything concerning him until, crossing the street, she became aware that he wore no hat.

"Did you lose it?" she asked curtly,

"I don't know what happened to that hysterical hat, Mrs. Paige. Probably it went war mad and followed the soldiers to the ferry. You can never count on hats. They're flighty."

"You will have to buy another," she said, smiling.

"Oh, no," he said carelessly, "what is the use. It will only follow the next regiment out of town. Shall we cross?"

"Mr. Berkley, do you propose to go about town with me, hatless?"

"You have an exceedingly beautiful one. Nobody will look at me."

"Please be sensible!"

"I am. I'll take you to Lord and Taylor's, deliver you to your sister-in-law, and then slink home----"

"But I don't wish to go there with a hatless man! I can't understand----"

"Well, I'll have to tell you if you drive me to it," he said, looking at her very calmly, but a flush mounted to his cheek-bones; "I have no money--with me."

"Why didn't you say so? How absurd not to borrow it from me----"

Something in his face checked her; then he laughed.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't know how poor I am," he said.

"It doesn't worry me, so it certainly will not worry you. I can't afford a hat for a few days--and I'll leave you here if you wish.

Why do you look so shocked? Oh, well--then we'll stop at Genin's.

They know me there."

They stopped at Genin's and he bought a hat and charged it, giving his addresses in a low voice; but she heard it.

"Is it becoming?" he asked airily, examining the effect in a glass.

"Am I the bully boy with the eye of glass, Mrs. Paige?"

"You are, indeed," she said, laughing. "Shall we find Celia?"

But they could not find her sister-in-law in the shop, which was now refilling with excited people.

"Celia _non est_," he observed cheerfully. "The office is closed by this time. May I see you safely to Brooklyn?"

She turned to the ferry stage which was now drawing up at the curb; he assisted her to mount, then entered himself, humming under his breath:

"To Brooklyn! To Brooklyn!

So be it. Amen.

Clippity, Cloppity, back again!"

On the stony way to the ferry he chatted cheerfully, irresponsibly, but he soon became convinced that the girl beside him was not listening, so he talked at random to amuse himself, amiably accepting her pre-occupation.

"How those broker warriors did step out, in spite of Illinois Central and a sadly sagging list! At the morning board Pacific Mail fell 3 1/2, New York Central 1/4, Hudson River 1/4, Harlem preferred 1/2, Illinois Central 3/4. . . . I don't care. . . .

You won't care, but the last quotations were Tennessee 6's, 41, A 41 1/2. . . . There's absolutely nothing doing in money or exchange. The bankers are asking 107 a 1/2 but sell nothing. On call you can borrow money at four and five per cent--" he glanced sideways at her, ironically, satisfied that she paid no heed--"_you_ might, but I can't, Ailsa. I can't borrow anything from anybody at any per cent whatever. I know; I've tried. Meanwhile, few and tottering are my stocks, also they continue downward on their hellward way.

"Margins wiped, out in war,
Profits are scattered far,
I'll to the nearest bar,
Ailsa oroon!"

he hummed to himself, walking-stick under his chin, his new hat not absolutely straight on his well-shaped head.

A ferry-boat lay in the slip; they walked forward and stood in the crowd by the bow chains. The flag new over Castle William; late sunshine turned river and bay to a harbour in fairyland, where, through the golden haze, far away between forests of pennant-dressed masts, a warship lay all aglitter, the sun striking fire from her guns and bright work, and setting every red bar of her flag ablaze.

"The Pocahontas, sloop of war from Charleston bar," said a man in the crowd. "She came in this morning at high water. She got to Sumter too late."

"Yes. Powhatan had already knocked the head off John Smith," observed Berkley thoughtfully. "They did these things better in colonial days."

Several people began to discuss the inaction of the fleet off Charleston bar during the bombardment; the navy was freely denounced and defended, and Berkley, pleased that he had started a row, listened complacently, inserting a word here and there calculated to incite several prominent citizens to fisticuffs. And the ferry-boat started with everybody getting madder.

But when fisticuffs appeared imminent in mid-stream, out of

somewhat tardy consideration for Ailsa he set free the dove of peace.

"Perhaps," he remarked pleasantly, "the fleet _couldn't_ cross the bar. I've heard of such things."

And as nobody had thought of that, hostilities were averted.

Paddle-wheels churning, the rotund boat swung into the Brooklyn dock. Her gunwales rubbed and squeaked along the straining piles green with sea slime; deck chains clinked, cog-wheels clattered, the stifling smell of dock water gave place to the fresher odour of the streets.

"I would like to walk uptown," said Ailsa Paige. "I really don't care to sit still in a car for two miles. You need not come any farther--unless you care to."

He said airily: "A country ramble with a pretty girl is always agreeable to me. I'll come if you'll let me."

She looked up at him, perplexed, undecided.

"Are you making fun of Brooklyn, or of me?"

"Of neither. May I come?"

"If you care to," she said.

They walked on together up Fulton Street, following the stream of returning sight-seers and business men, passing recruiting stations where red-legged infantry of the 14th city regiment stood in groups reading the extras just issued by the *_Eagle_* and *_Brooklyn Times_* concerning the bloody riot in Baltimore and the attack on the 6th Massachusetts. Everywhere, too, soldiers of the 13th, 38th, and 70th regiments of city infantry, in blue state uniforms, were marching about briskly, full of the business of recruiting and of their departure, which was scheduled for the twenty-third of April.

Already the complexion of the Brooklyn civic sidewalk crowds was everywhere brightened by military uniforms; cavalymen of the troop of dragoons attached to the 8th New York, jaunty lancers from the troop of lancers attached to the 69th New York, riflemen in green epaulettes and facings, zouaves in red, blue, and brown uniforms came hurrying down the stony street to Fulton Ferry on their return from witnessing a parade of the 14th Brooklyn at Fort Greene. And every figure in uniform thrilled the girl with suppressed excitement and pride.

Berkley, eyeing them askance, began blandly:

"Citizens of martial minds,
Uniforms of wondrous kinds,
Wonderful the sights we see--
Ailsa, you'll agree with me."

"_Are_ you utterly without human feeling?" she demanded. "Because, if you are, there isn't the slightest use of my pretending to be civil to you any longer."

"Have you been pretending?"

"I suppose you think me destitute of humour," she said, "but there is nothing humorous about patriotism and self-sacrifice to me, and nothing very admirable about those who mock it."

Her cheeks were deeply flushed; she looked straight ahead of her as she walked beside him.

Yet, even now the swift little flash of anger revealed an inner glimpse to her of her unaltered desire to know this man; of her interest in him--of something about him that attracted her but defied analysis---or had defied it until, pursuing it too far one day, she had halted suddenly and backed away.

Then, curiously, reflectively, little by little, she retraced her steps. And curiosity urged her to investigate in detail the Four Fears--fear of the known in another, fear of the unknown in another, fear of the known in one's self, fear of the unknown in one's self. _That_ halted her again, for she knew now that it was something within herself that threatened her. But it was his nearness to her that evoked it.

For she saw, now that her real inclination was to be with him, that she had liked him from the first, had found him agreeable--pleasant past belief--and that, although there seemed to be no reason for her liking, no excuse, nothing to explain her half-fearful pleasure in his presence, and her desire for it, she did desire it. And for the first time since her widowhood she felt that she had been living her life out along lines that lay closer to solitude than to the happy freedom of which she had reluctantly dreamed locked in the manacles of a loveless marriage.

For her marriage had been one of romantic pity, born of the ignorance of her immaturity; and she was very young when she became the wife of Warfield Paige--Celia's brother--a gentle, sweet-tempered invalid, dreamy, romantic, and pitifully confident of life, the days of which were already numbered.

Of the spiritual passions she knew a little--of the passion of

pity, of consent, of self-sacrifice, of response to spiritual need.

But neither in her early immaturity nor in later adolescence had she ever before entertained even the most innocent inclination for a man. Man's attractions, physical and personal, had left only the lightest of surface impressions--until the advent of this man.

To what in him was she responsive? What intellectual charm had he revealed? What latent spiritual excellence did she suspect? What were his lesser qualities--the simpler moral virtues--the admirable attributes which a woman could recognise. Nay, where even were the nobler failings, the forgivable faults, the promise of future things?

Her uplifted, questioning eyes searched and fell. Only the clear-cut beauty of his head answered her, only the body's grace.

She sometimes suspected pity as her one besetting sin. Was it pity for this man--a young man only twenty-four, her own age, so cheerful under the crushing weight of material ruin? Was it his poverty that appealed?

Was it her instinct to protect? If all she heard was true, he sorely needed protection from himself. For tales of him had filtered to her young ears--indefinite rumours of unworthy things--of youth wasted and manhood threatened--of excesses incomprehensible to her, and to those who hinted them to her.

Was it his solitude in the world for which she was sorry? She had no parents, either. But she had their house and their memories concrete in every picture, every curtain, every chair and sofa. Twilight whispered of them through every hallway, every room; dawn was instinct with their unseen spirits, sweetening everything in the quiet old house. . . . And that day she had learned where he lived. And she dared not imagine how.

They turned together into the quiet, tree-shaded street, and, in the mellow sunset light, something about it, and the pleasant vine-hung house, and the sense of restfulness moved her with a wistful impulse that he, too, should share a little of the home welcome that awaited her from her own kin.

"Will you remain and dine with us, Mr. Berkley?"

He looked up, so frankly surprised at her kindness that it hurt her all through.

"I want to be friends with you," she said impulsively. "Didn't you know it?"

They had halted at the foot of the stoop.

"I should think you could see how easy it would be for us to become friends," she said with pretty self-possession. But her heart was beating violently.

His pulses, too, were rapping out a message to his intelligence:

"You had better not go in," it ran. "You are not fit to go in.

You had better keep away from her. You know what will happen if you don't."

As they entered the house her sister-in-law rose from the piano in the front parlour and came forward.

"_Were_ you worried, dearest?" cried Ailsa gaily. "I really couldn't help it. And Mr. Berkley lost his hat, and I've brought him back to dinner."

CHAPTER VII

To Berkley the times were surcharged with agreeable agitation. A hullabaloo diverted him. He himself was never noisy; but agitated and noisy people always amused him.

Day after day the city's multi-coloured militia regiments passed through its echoing streets; day after day Broadway resounded with

the racket of their drums. Rifles, chasseurs, zouaves, foot artillery, pioneers, engineers, rocket batteries, the 79th Highlanders, dismounted lancers of the 69th and dragoons of the 8th--every heard-of and unheard-of unnecessary auxiliary to a respectable regiment of state infantry, mustered for inspection and marched away in polychromatic magnificence. Park, avenue, and square shrilled with their windy fifes; the towering sides of the transports struck back the wild music of their bands; Castle William and Fort Hamilton saluted them from the ferries to the Narrows; and, hoarse with cheering, the people stared through dim eyes till the last stain of smoke off Sandy Hook vanished seaward. All of which immensely diverted Berkley.

The city, too, had become a thoroughfare for New England and Western troops hurrying pell-mell toward the capital and that unknown bourne so vaguely defined as the "seat of war." Also all avenues were now dotted with barracks and recruiting stations, around which crowds clamoured. Fire Zouaves, Imperial Zouaves, National Zouaves, Billy Wilson's Zouaves appropriated without ceremony the streets and squares as drill grounds. All day long they manoeuvred and double-quickened; all day and all night herds of surprised farm horses destined for cavalry, light artillery, and glory, clattered toward the docks; files of brand-new army waggons, gun-carriages, smelling of fresh paint, caissons, forges, ambulances bound South checked the city traffic and added to the city's tumult as they jolted in hundreds and hundreds toward the wharves--materially contributing to Berkley's entertainment.

Beginning with the uproarious war meeting in Union Square, every day saw its crowds listening to the harangue of a somebody or a nobody. Sometimes short, ugly demonstrations were made against an unpopular newspaper office or the residence of an unpopular citizen; the police were rough and excitable, the nerves of the populace on edge, the city was now nearly denuded of its militia, and everybody was very grateful for the temporary presence of volunteer regiments in process of formation.

As yet the tension of popular excitement had not jaded the capacity of the city for pleasure. People were ready for excitement, welcomed it after the dreadful year of lethargy. Stocks fell, but the theatres were the fuller; Joseph Jefferson at Winter Garden, Wallack at his own theatre, "The Seven Sisters" at Laura Keane's, drew unsatisfied crowds, galloping headlong on the heels of pleasure.

Philharmonics, plays, burlesques, concerts, minstrel entertainments, never lacked audiences, especially when the proceeds were destined for the Union Defence Committee; the hotels, Bancroft, St. Nicholas, Metropolitan, New York, Fifth Avenue, were all brilliantly thronged at night; cafes and concert halls like the Gaieties, Canterbury, and American, flourished and flaunted their advertisements; grills, restaurants, saloons, multiplied. There were none too many for Berkley's amusement.

As yet no battle lightning flickered along the Southern horizon to sober folk with premonition; but the nightly illumination of the metropolis was becoming tinged with a more sinister reflection where licence had already begun to lift a dozen hydra-heads from certain lurid resorts hitherto limited in number and in impudence.

It was into the streets of such a city, a meaner, dirtier, uglier, noisier, perhaps more vicious edition of the French metropolis of the Third Empire, thronged with fantastic soldiery and fox-eyed contractors, filled already with new faces--faces of Western born, Yankee born, foreign born; stupid faces, crafty faces, hard faces, bedizened faces--it was into the streets of such a city that Berkley sauntered twice a day to and fro from his office, regretting only that his means did not permit him to go to the devil like a gentleman.

And one day, out of the hurly-burly, and against all laws of probability and finance, an incredible letter was handed to him. And he read it, standing by his window, and calmly realised that he was now no longer penniless.

Some inspired idiot had become a credulous market for his apparently unmarketable securities. Who this person was his brokers did not say; but, whoever it was, had bought every rotten share he held; and there was money for him in the world to help him

out of it.

As he stood there, the letter in his hands, drums sounded across the street, and Stephen came in from the outer office.

"Another regiment," he said. "Do you know where they come from?"

Berkley shook his head, and they went to the windows; below them surged the flood of dead wood driven before the oncoming waves--haggard men, ragged men, small boys, darkies, Bowery b'hoys, stray red-shirted firemen, then the police, then solid double ranks of drums battered by flashing, brass-bound drumsticks, then line after line of blue and steel, steadily flowing through the streets and away, away into the unknown.

"How young they are!" muttered Farren, the gray-haired cashier, standing behind Stephen's shoulders. "God bless me, they're children!"

"It's a Vermont regiment," said Berkley; "they're filing out of the Park Barracks. What a lot of hawk-nosed, hatchet-faced, turkey-necked cow milkers!--all heroes, too, Steve. You can tell that because they're in uniform and carry guns."

Stephen watched the lank troops, fascinated by the long, silent,

almost gliding stride of officers and men loaded down with knapsack, blanket, and canteen, their caps pushed high on their red and sweating foreheads. There was a halt; big hands, big red knuckles, big feet, and the delicate curve of the hawk's beak outlining every Yankee nose, queer, humourous, restless glances sweeping Gotham streets and windows where Gotham crowded to gaze back at the halted youngsters in blue; then a far tenor cry, nasal commands, thin voices penetrating from out of the crowded distance; a sudden steadying of ranks; the level flash of shouldered steel; a thousand men marking time; and at last the drums' quick outbreak; and the 1st Vermont Infantry passed onward into the unknown.

"I'd rather like to go there--to see what there is there," observed Berkley.

"Where?"

"Where they're going--wherever that may be--and I think I know."

He glanced absently at his letter again.

"I've sold some stock--all I had, and I've made a lot of money," he said listlessly.

Stephen dropped an impulsive hand on his shoulder.

"I'm terribly glad, Berkley! I'm delighted!" he said with a warmth that brought a slight colour into Berkley's face.

"That's nice of you, Stephen. It solves the immediate problem of how to go there."

"Go where?"

"Why--where all our bright young men are going, old fellow," said Berkley, laughing. "I can go with a regiment or I can go alone. But I really must be starting."

"You mean to enlist?"

"Yes, it can be done that way, too. Or--other ways. The main thing is to get momentum. . . . I think I'll just step out and say good-bye and many thanks to your father. I shall be quite busy for the rest of my career."

"You are not leaving here?"

"I am. But I'll pay my rent first," said Berkley, laughing.

And go he did that very afternoon; and the office of Craig & Son knew him no more.

A few days later Ailsa Paige returned to New York and reoccupied her own house on London Terrace.

A silk flag drooped between the tall pilasters. Under it, at the front door stood Colonel Arran to welcome her. It had been her father's house; he had planted the great catalpa trees on the grassy terrace in front. Here she had been born; from here she had gone away a bride; from here her parents had been buried, both within that same strange year that left her widowed who had scarcely been a wife. And to this old house she had returned alone in her sombre weeds--utterly alone, in her nineteenth year.

This man had met her then as he met her now; she remembered it, remembered, too, that after any absence, no matter how short, this old friend had always met her at her own door-sill, standing aside with head bent as she crossed the sill.

Now she gave him both hands.

"It is so kind of you, dear Colonel Arran! It would not be a home-coming without you--" And glancing into the hall, nodded

radiantly to the assembled servants--her parents' old and privileged and spoiled servants gathered to welcome the young mistress to her own.

"Oh--and there's Missy!" she said, as an inquiring "meow!" sounded close to her skirts. "You irresponsible little thing--I suppose you have more kittens. Has she, Susan?"

"Five m'm," said Susan drily.

"Oh, dear, I suppose it can't be avoided. But we mustn't drown any, you know." And with one hand resting on Colonel Arran's arm she began a tour of the house to inspect the new improvements.

Later they sat together amid the faded splendours of the southern drawing-room, where sunshine regilded cornice and pier glass, turned the lace curtains to nets of gold, and streaked the red damask hangings with slanting bars of fire.

Shiftless old Jonas shuffled in presently with the oval silver tray, ancient decanters, and seedcakes.

And here, over their cakes and Madeira, she told him about her month's visit to the Craigs'; about her life in the quaint and quiet city, the restful, old-fashioned charm of the cultivated

circles on Columbia Heights and the Hill; the attractions of a limited society, a little dull, a little prim, pedantic, perhaps provincially simple, but a society caring for the best in art, in music, in literature, instinctively recognising the best although the best was nowhere common in the city.

She spoke of the agreeable people she had met--unobtrusive, gentle-mannered folk whose homes may have lacked such Madeira and silver as this, but lacked nothing in things of the mind.

She spoke of her very modest and temporary duties in church work there, and in charities; told of the advent of the war news and its effect on the sister city.

And at last, casually, but without embarrassment, she mentioned Berkley.

Colonel Arran's large hand lay along the back of the Virginia sofa, fingers restlessly tracing and retracing the carved foliations supporting the horns of plenty. His heavy, highly coloured head was lowered and turned aside a little as though to bring one ear to bear on what she was saying.

"Mr. Berkley seems to be an--unusual man," she ventured. "Do you happen to know him, Colonel Arran?"

"Slightly."

"Oh. Did you know his parents?"

"His mother."

"She is not living, I believe."

"No."

"Is his father living?"

"I--don't know."

"You never met him?"

Colonel Arran's forefinger slowly outlined the deeply carved horn of plenty.

"I am not perfectly sure that I ever met Mr. Berkley's father."

She sat, elbows on the table, gazing reflectively into space.

"He is a--curious--man."

"Did you like him?" asked Colonel Arran with an effort.

"Yes," she said, so simply that the Colonel's eyes turned directly toward her, lingered, then became fixed on the sunlit damask folds behind her.

"What did you like about Mr. Berkley, Ailsa?"

She considered.

"I--don't know---exactly."

"Is he cultivated?"

"Why, yes--I suppose so."

"Is he well bred?"

"Oh, yes; only--" she searched mentally--"he is not--may I say,

conventional? formal?"

"It is an age of informality," observed Colonel Arran, carefully tracing out each separate grape in the horn of plenty.

Ailsa assented; spoke casually of something else; but when Colonel Arran brought the conversation around again to Berkley, she in nowise seemed reluctant.

"He is unusually attractive," she said frankly; "his features, at moments, are almost beautiful. I sometimes wonder whether he resembles his mother. Was she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"I thought she must have been. He resembles her, does he not?"

"Yes."

"His father was--is--" She hesitated, looked curiously at Colonel Arran, then smiled.

"There was something I never thought of when I first met Mr. Berkley, but now I understand why his features seemed to me not

entirely unfamiliar. I don't know exactly what it is, but there seems to be something about him that recalls you."

Colonel Arran sat absolutely still, his heavy hand gripping the horn of plenty, his face so gray that it was almost colourless.

Ailsa, glancing again at his profile, saw nothing now in it resembling Berkley; and, as he made no response, thought him uninterested. But when again she would have changed the subject, the Colonel stirred, interrupting:

"Does he seem--well?"

"Well?" she repeated. "Oh, yes."

"He--seems well . . . and in good spirits? Contented? Is he that type of young man? Happy?"

"I don't think he is really very happy, though he is cheerful and--and amusing. I don't see how he can be very light-hearted."

"Why?"

She shook her head:

"I believe he--I know he must be in painfully straightened circumstances."

"I have heard so," nodded Colonel Arran.

"Oh, he certainly is!" she said with decision. "He lost everything in the panic, and he lives in a most wretched neighbourhood, and he hasn't any business except a very little now and then. It made me quite unhappy," she added naively.

"And you find him personally agreeable?"

"Yes, I do. I didn't at first--" She checked herself--"I mean I did at the very first--then I didn't--then I did again, then I--didn't--" The delicate colour stole into her cheeks; she lifted her wineglass, looked into it pensively, set it back on the table.

"But I understand him better now, I think."

"What, in him, do you understand better now?"

"I--don't--know."

"Is he a better kind of a man than you thought him at first?"

"Y-es. He has it in him to be better, I mean. . . . Yes, he is a better man than I thought him--once."

"And you like him----"

"Yes, I do. Colonel Arran."

"Admire him?"

She flushed up. "How do you mean?"

"His qualities?"

"Oh. . . . Yes, he has qualities."

"Admirable?"

"He is exceedingly intelligent."

"Intellectual?"

"I don't exactly know. He pretends to make fun of so many things. It is not easy to be perfectly sure what he really believes; because he laughs at almost everybody and everything. But I am quite certain that he really has beliefs."

"Religious?"

She looked grave. "He does not go to church."

"Does he--does he strike you as being--well, say, irresponsible--perhaps I may even say reckless?"

She did not answer; and Colonel Arran did not ask again. He remained silent so long that she presently drifted off into other subjects, and he made no effort to draw her back.

But later, when he took his leave, he said in his heavy way:

"When you see Mr. Berkley, say to him that Colonel Arran remembers him. . . . Say to him that it would be my--pleasure--to renew our very slight acquaintance."

"He will be glad, I know," she said warmly.

"Why do you think so?"

"Why? Because _I_ like you!" she explained with a gay little laugh. "And whoever I like Mr. Berkley must like if he and I are to remain good friends."

The Colonel's smile was wintry; the sudden animation in his face had subsided.

"I should like to know him--if he will," he said absently. And took his leave of Ailsa Paige.

Next afternoon he came again, and lingered, though neither he nor Ailsa spoke of Berkley. And the next afternoon he reappeared, and sat silent, preoccupied, for a long time, in the peculiar hushed attitude of a man who listens. But the door-bell did not ring and the only sound in the house was from Ailsa's piano, where she sat idling through the sunny afternoon.

The next afternoon he said:

"Does he never call on you?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Berkley."

"I--asked him," she replied, flushing faintly.

"He has not come, then?"

"Not yet. I suppose--business----"

The Colonel said, ponderously careless: "I imagine that he is likely to come in the late afternoon--when he does come."

"I don't know. He is in business."

"It doesn't keep him after three o'clock at his office."

She looked up surprised: "Doesn't it?" And her eyes asked instinctively: "How did you know?" But the Colonel sat silent again, his head lowered and partly averted as though to turn his good ear toward her. Clearly his mind already dwelt on other matters, she was thinking; but she was mistaken.

"When he comes," said Colonel Arran slowly, "will you have the

kindness to say to him that Colonel Arran will be glad to renew the acquaintance?"

"Yes. . . . Perhaps he has forgotten the street and number. I might write to him--to remind him?" Colonel Arran made no answer.

She wrote that night:

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"I am in my own house now and am very contented--which does not mean that I did not adore being with Celia Craig and Estcourt and the children.

"But home is pleasant, and I am wondering whether you might care to see the home of which I have so often spoken to you when you used to come over to Brooklyn to see me [me erased and us neatly substituted in long, sweeping characters].

"I have been doing very little since I last saw you--it is not sheer idleness, but somehow one cannot go light-heartedly to dinners and concerts and theatres in times like these, when traitors are trampling the nag under foot, and when thousands and thousands of young men are leaving the city every day to go to the defence of our distracted country.

"I saw a friend the other day--a Mrs. Wells--and three of her boys, friends of mine, have gone with the 7th, and she is so nervous and excited that she can scarcely speak about it. So many men I know have gone or are going. Stephen was here yesterday, wild to go with the 8d Zouaves, but I promised his father to use my influence--and he is too young--although it is very fine and chivalrous of him to wish to go.

"I thought I would write you a little note, to remind you that I am at home, and already it has become a letter. Please remember--when you think of it at all--that it would give me pleasure to receive you.

"Sincerely yours,

"AILSA PAIGE."

Toward the end of the week she received a heart-broken note from Celia Craig, which caused her to hasten over to Brooklyn. She arrived late; the streets were continually blocked by departing troops, and the omnibus took a circuitous course to the ferry, going by way of Fourth Avenue and the Bowery.

"Honey-bee! O Honey-bell!" whispered her sister-in-law, taking

Ailsa into her arms, "I could have behaved myse'f better if Curt were on the side of God and Justice!--But to have to let him go this way--to know the awful danger--to know he is going against my own people, my own home--against God and the Right!--O Honey-bird! Honey-bud! And the Charleston Mercury says that the South is most bitter against the Zouaves----"

"Curt! With the Zouaves!"

"Oh yes, yes, Honey-bee! The Third Regiment. And he--some wicked old men came here yesterday and read a speech--right befo' me--here in this ve'y room--and began to say that they wished him to be colonel of the 3d Zouaves, and that the Governor wished it and--other fools! And I rose straight up f'om my chair and I said, 'Curt!' And he gave me one look. Oh, Honey-bud! His face was changed; there was that same thing in it that I saw the night the news came about Sumter! And he said: 'Gentlemen, my country educated me; now it honours me.' And I tried to speak again and my lips were stiff; and then he said: 'I accept the command you offer----'"

"Oh, Celia!"

"Yes, he said it, darling! I stood there, frozen--in a corner of my heart I had been afraid--such a long time!--but to have it come real--'this terror!--to have this thing take my husband--come into

our own home befo' I knew--befo' I dreamed--and take Curt!--take
--my--Curt!"

"Where is he?"

"With--_them_. They have a camp near Fort Hamilton. He went there
this morning."

"When is he coming back?"

"I don't know. Stephen is scaring me most to death; he is wild to
go, too. And, oh--do you believe it? Captain Lent has gone with
Curt to the camp, and Curt means to recommend him for his major.
What a regiment!--all the soldiers are mere boys, they
say--wilful, reckless, hair-brained boys who don't know--_can't_
know--where they're going. . . . And Curt is so blind without his
glasses, and Captain Lent is certainly a little mad, and I'm most
distracted myse'f----"

"Darling--darling--don't cry!"

"Cry? Oh, I could die, Ailsa. Yet, I'm Southern enough to choke
back eve'y tear and let them go with a smile if they had to go fo'
God and the Right! But to see my Curt go this way--and my only son
crazy to join him--Oh, it is ha'd, Honey-bee, ve'y, ve'y ha'd."

"Dearest!"

"O Honey-bud! Honey-bud!"

And the two women mourned, uncomforted.

Ailsa remained for three unhappy days in Fort Greene Place, then fled to her own house. A light, amusing letter from Berkley awaited her. It was so like him, gay, cynical, epigrammatic, and inconsequent, that it cheered her. Besides, he subscribed himself very obediently hers, but on re-examining the letter she noticed that he had made no mention of coming to pay his respects to her.

So she lived her tranquil life for another week; and Colonel Arran came every day and seemed always to be waiting for something--always listening--gray face buried in his stock. And at the week's end she answered Berkley's letter--although, in it, he had asked no question.

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"Such sad news from the Craigs. Estcourt has accepted the command of one of the new zouave regiments--the 3d, in camp near Fort

Hamilton. But, being in his office, I suppose you have heard all about it from Stephen. Poor Celia Craig! It is peculiarly distressing in her case; all her sympathies are with her native state, and to have her husband go under such unusually tragic circumstances seems too dreadful. Celia is convinced that he will never return; she reads some Southern paper which breathes awful threats against the Zouaves in particular. Besides, Stephen is perfectly determined to enlist in his father's regiment, and I can see that they can't restrain him much longer. I have done my best; I have had him here and talked to him and argued with him, but I have made no headway. No appeal moves him; he says that the land will need every man sooner or later, and that the quicker he begins the sooner he will learn how to look out for himself in battle.

"The regiment is almost full; to-day, the first six companies are to be mustered into the United States service for three years or for the war. Captain Barris of the regular army is the mustering officer. And on their departure I am to present a set of colours to the regiment. It is to be quite solemn. I have already bought the lances, and they are beautiful; the spears are silver gilt, the rings gilded, too, and the flags are made of the most beautiful silk with tassels and fringe of gold bullion. There are three flags: the national colours, the state flag, and a purple regimental flag lettered in gold: '3d Regt. N. Y. Zouaves,' and under it their motto: 'Multorum manibus grande levatur onus.' I hope it is good Latin, for it is mine. Is it?

"AILSA PAIGE."

To this letter he made no reply, and, after a week, his silence hurt her.

One afternoon toward the middle of May Stephen was announced; and with a sudden sense of foreboding she hastened down to the drawing-room.

"_Oh_!" she cried. "_You_--Stephen!"

But the boy in his zouave uniform was beside himself with excitement and pride, and he embraced her, laughing, and then began to walk up and down the room gesticulating.

"I couldn't stand it any longer, and they let me go. I'm sorry for mother, but look at other men's mothers! They're calling for more and more troops every week! I knew everybody would have to go, and I'm mighty fortunate to get into father's regiment--And O Ailsa! It is a fine regiment! We're drilling every minute, and now that we've got our uniforms it won't be long before our orders come----"

"Stephen--does your mother----"

"Mother knows I can't help it. I do love her; she knows that perfectly well. But men have got to settle this thing----"

"Two hundred thousand are getting ready to settle it! Are there not enough without you?--your mother's only son----"

"Suppose everybody thought that way, where would our army be?"

"But there are hundreds of regiments forming here--getting ready, drilling, leaving on boats and trains every day----"

"And every regiment is composed of men exactly like me! They go because the Nation's business is everybody's business. And the Nation's business comes first. There's no use talking to me, Ailsa. I've had it but with father. He saw that he couldn't prevent me from doing what he has done. And old Lent is our major! Lord, Ailsa, what a terrible old man for discipline! And father is--well he is acting as though we ought to behave like West Pointers. They're cruelly hard on skylarkers and guard runners, and they're fairly kicking discipline into us. But I'm willing. I'm ready to stand anything as long as we can get away!"

He was talking in a loud, excited voice, pacing restlessly to and fro, pausing at intervals to confront Ailsa where she sat, limp and silent, gazing up at this slender youth in his short blue jacket

edged with many bell-buttons, blue body sash, scarlet zouave trousers and leather gaiters.

Presently old Jonas shuffled in with Madeira, cakes, and sandwiches, and Stephen began on them immediately.

"I came over so you could see me in my uniform," he explained; "and I'm going back right away to see mother and Paige and Marye and Camilla." He paused, sandwich suspended, then swallowed what he had been chewing and took another bite, recklessly.

"I'm very fond of Camilla," he said condescendingly. "She's very nice about my going--the only one who hasn't snivelled. I tell you, Ailsa, Camilla is a good deal of a girl. . . . And I've promised to look out for her uncle--keep an eye on old Lent, you know, which seems to comfort her a good deal when she begins crying----

"Oh. . . I thought Camilla didn't cry."

"She cries a little--now and then."

"About her uncle?"

"Certainly."

Ailsa looked down at her ringless fingers. Within the week she had laid away both rings, meaning to resume them some day.

"If you and your father go, your office will be closed, I suppose."

"Oh, no. Farren will run it."

"I see. . . . And Mr. Berkley, too, I suppose."

Stephen looked up from his bitten seedcake.

"Berkley? He left long ago."

"Left--where?" she asked, confused.

"Left the office. It couldn't be helped. There was nothing for him to do. I was sorry--I'm sorrier now----"

He checked himself, hesitated, turned his troubled eyes on Ailsa.

"I did like him so much."

"Don't you like him--still?"

"Yes--_I_ do. I don't know what was the matter with that man. He went all to pieces."

"W-what!"

"Utterly. Isn't it too bad."

She sat there very silent, very white. Stephen bit into another cake, angrily.

"It's the company he keeps," he said--"a lot of fast men--fast enough to be talked about, fashionable enough to be tolerated--Jack Casson is one of them, and that little ass, Arthur Wye. _That's_ the crowd--a horse-racing, hard-drinking, hard-gambling crew."

"But--he is--Mr. Berkley's circumstances--how can he do such things----"

"Some idiot--even Berkley doesn't know who--took all those dead stocks off his hands. Wasn't it the devil's own luck for Berkley to find a market in times like these?"

"But it ended him. . . . Oh, I was fond of him, I tell you, Ailsa!

I hate like thunder to see him this way----"

"_What_ way!"

"Oh, not caring for anybody or anything. He's never sober. I don't mean that I ever saw him otherwise--he doesn't get drunk like an ordinary man: he just turns deathly white and polite. I've met him--and his friends--several times. They're too fast a string of colts for me. But isn't it a shame that a man like Berkley should go to the devil--and for no reason at all?"

"Yes," she said.

When Stephen, swinging his crimson fez by the tassel, stood ready to take his leave, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

After he departed Colonel Arran came, and sat, as usual, silent, listening.

Ailsa was very animated; she told him about Stephen's enlistment, asked scores of questions about military life, the chances in battle, the proportion of those who went through war unscathed.

And at length Colonel Arran arose to take his departure; and she had not told what was hammering for utterance in every heart beat; she did not know how to tell, what to ask.

Hat in hand Colonel Arran bent over her hot little hand where it lay in his own.

"I have been offered the colonelcy of a volunteer regiment now forming," he said without apparent interest.

"You!"

"Cavalry," he explained wearily.

"But--you have not accepted!"

He gave her an absent glance. "Yes, I have accepted. . . . I am going to Washington to-night."

"Oh!" she breathed, "but you are coming back before--before----"

"Yes, child. Cavalry is not made in a hurry. I am to see General

Scott--perhaps Mr. Cameron and the President. . . . If, in my absence--" he hesitated, looked down, shook his head. And somehow she seemed to know that what he had not said concerned Berkley.

Neither of them mentioned him. But after Colonel Arran had gone she went slowly to her room, sat down at her desk, sat there a long, long while thinking. But it was after midnight before she wrote to Berkley:

"Have you quite forgotten me? I have had to swallow a little pride to write you again. But perhaps I think our pleasant friendship worth it.

"Stephen has been here. He has enlisted as a private in his father's regiment of zouaves. I learned by accident from him that you are no longer associated with Craig & Son in business. I trust this means at least a partial recovery of your fortune. If it does, with fortune recovered responsibilities increase, and I choose to believe that it is these new and exacting duties which have prevented me from seeing you or from hearing from you for more than three weeks.

"But surely you could find a moment to write a line to a friend who is truly your very sincere well-wisher, and who would be the first to express her pleasure in any good fortune which might concern you.

"AILSA PAIGE."

Two days passed, and her answer came:

"Ailsa Paige, dearest and most respected, I have not forgotten you for one moment. And I have tried very hard.

"God knows what my pen is trying to say to you, and not hurt you, and yet kill utterly in you the last kindly and charitable memory of the man who is writing to you.

"Ailsa, if I had known you even one single day before that night I met you, you would have had of me, in that single day, all that a man dare lay at the feet of the truest and best of women.

"But on that night I came to you a man utterly and hopelessly ruined--morally dead of a blow dealt me an hour before I saw you for the first time.

"I had not lived an orderly life, but at worst it was only a heedless life. I had been a fool, but not a damned one. There was in me something loftier than a desire for pleasure, something worthier than material ambition. What else lay latent--if anything--I may only surmise. It is all dead.

"The blow dealt me that evening--an hour before I first laid eyes on you--utterly changed me; and if there was anything spiritual in my character it died then. And left what you had a glimpse of--just a man, pagan, material, unmoral, unsafe; unmoved by anything except by what appeals to the material senses.

"Is that the kind of man you suppose me? That is the man I am. And you know it now. And you know, now, what it was in me that left you perplexed, silent, troubled, not comprehending--why it was you would not dance with me again, nor suffer my touch, nor endure me too near you.

"It was the less noble in me--all that the blow had not killed--only a lesser part of a finer and perfect passion that might perhaps have moved you to noble response in time.

"Because I should have given you all at the first meeting; I could no more have helped it than I could have silenced my heart and lived. But what was left to give could awake in you no echo, no response, no comprehension. In plainer, uglier words, I meant to make you love me; and I was ready to carry you with me to that hell where souls are lost through love--and where we might lose our souls together.

"And now you will never write to me again."

All the afternoon she bent at her desk, poring over his letter. In her frightened heart she knew that something within her, not spiritual, had responded to what, in him, had evoked it; that her indefinable dread was dread of herself, of her physical responsiveness to his nearness, of her conscious inclination for it.

Could this be she--herself--who still bent here over his written words--this tense, hot-cheeked, tremulous creature, staring dry-eyed at the blurring lines which cut her for ever asunder from this self-outlawed man!

Was this letter still unburned. Had she not her fill of its brutality, its wickedness?

But she was very tired, and she laid her arms on the desk and her head between them. And against her hot face she felt the cool letter-paper.

All that she had dreamed and fancied and believed and cared for in man passed dully through her mind. Her own aspirations toward ideal womanhood followed--visions of lofty desire, high ideals, innocent passions, the happiness of renunciation, the glory of forgiveness----

She sat erect, breathing unevenly; then her eyes fell on the letter, and she covered it with her hands, as hands cover the shame on a stricken face. And after a long time her lips moved, repeating:

"The glory of forgiveness--the glory of forgiveness----"

Her heart was beating very hard and fast as her thoughts ran on.

"To forgive--help him--teach truth--nobler ideals----"

She could not rest; sleep, if it really came, was a ghostly thing that mocked her. And all the next day she roamed about the house, haunted with the consciousness of where his letter lay locked in her desk. And that day she would not read it again; but the next day she read it. And the next.

And if it were her desire to see him once again before all ended irrevocably for ever--or if it was what her heart was striving to tell her, that he was in need of aid against himself, she could not tell. But she wrote him:

"It is not you who have written this injury for my eyes to read,

but another man, demoralised by the world's cruelty--not knowing what he is saying--hurt to the soul, not mortally. When he recovers he will be you. And this letter is my forgiveness."

Berkley received it when he was not particularly sober; and lighting the end of it at a candle let it burn until the last ashes scorched his fingers.

"Burgess," he said, "did you ever notice how hard it is for the frailer things to die? Those wild doves we used to shoot in Georgia--by God! it took quail shot to kill them clean."

"Yes, sir?"

"Exactly. Then, that being the case, you may give me a particularly vigorous shampoo. Because, Burgess, I woo my volatile goddess to-night--the Goddess Chance, Burgess, whose wanton and naughty eyes never miss the fall of a card. And I desire that all my senses work like lightning, Burgess, because it is a fast company and a faster game, and that's why I want an unusually muscular shampoo!"

"Yes, sir. Poker, sir?"

"I--ah--believe so," said Berkley, lying back in his chair and

closing his eyes. "Go ahead and rub hell into me--if I'll hold any more."

The pallor, the shadows under eyes and cheeks, the nervous lines at the corners of the nose, had almost disappeared when Burgess finished. And when he stood in his evening clothes pulling a rose-bud stem through the button-hole of his lapel, he seemed very fresh and young and graceful in the gas-light.

"Am I very fine, Burgess? Because I go where youth and beauty chase the shining hours with flying feet. Oh yes, Burgess, the fair and frail will be present, also the dashing and self-satisfied. And we'll try to make it agreeable all around, won't we? . . . And don't smoke all my most expensive cigars, Burgess. I may want one when I return. I hate to ask too much of you, but you won't mind leaving one swallow of brandy in that decanter, will you? Thanks. Good night, Burgess."

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

As he walked out into the evening air he swung his cane in glittering circles.

"Nevertheless," he said under his breath, "she'd better be careful. If she writes again I might lose my head and go to her. You can

never tell about some men; and the road to hell is a lonely one--damned lonely. Better let a man travel it like a gentleman if he can. It's more dignified than sliding into it on your back, clutching a handful of lace petticoat."

He added: "There's only one hell; and it's hell, perhaps, because there are no women there."

CHAPTER VIII

Berkley, hollow-eyed, ghastly white, but smiling, glanced at the clock.

"Only one more hand after this," he said. "I open it for the limit."

"All in," said Cortlandt briefly. "What are you going to do now?"

"_Scindere glaciem_," observed Berkley, "you may give me three cards, Cortlandt." He took them, scanned his hand, tossed the discards into the centre of the table, and bet ten dollars.

Through the tobacco smoke drifting in level bands, the crystal chandeliers in Cortlandt's house glimmered murkily; the cigar haze even stretched away into the farther room, where, under brilliantly lighted side brackets, a young girl sat playing at the piano, a

glass of champagne, gone flat, at her dimpled elbow. Another girl, in a shrimp-pink evening gown, one silken knee drooping over the other, lay half buried among the cushions, singing the air which the player at the piano picked out by ear. A third girl, velvet-eyed and dark of hair, listened pensively, turning the gems on her fingers.

The pretty musician at the piano was playing an old song, once much admired by the sentimental; the singer, reclining amid her cushions, sang the words, absently:

"Why did I give my heart away--
Give it so lightly, give it to pay
For a pleasant dream on a summer's day?

"Why did I give? I do not know.
Surely the passing years will show.

"Why did I give my love away--
Give it in April, give it in May,
For a young man's smile on a summer's day?

"Why did I love? I do not know.
Perhaps the passing years will show.

"Why did I give my soul away--

Give it so gaily, give it to pay

For a sigh and a kiss on a summer's day?

"Perhaps the passing years may show;

My heart and I, we do not know."

She broke off short, swung on the revolving chair, and called: "Mr.

Berkley, are you going to see me home?"

"Last jack, Miss Carew," said Berkley, "I'm opening it for the

limit. Give me one round of fixed ammunition, Arthur."

"There's no use drawing," observed another man, laying down his

hand, "Berkley cleans us up as usual."

He was right; everything went to Berkley, as usual, who laughed and

turned a dissipated face to Casson.

"Cold decks?" he suggested politely. "Your revenge at your

convenience, Jack."

Casson declined. Cortlandt, in his brilliant zouave uniform, stood

up and stretched his arms until the scarlet chevrons on the blue

sleeves wrinkled into jagged lightning.

"It's been very kind of you all to come to my last 'good-bye party,'" he yawned, looking sleepily around him through the smoke at his belongings.

For a week he had been giving a "good-bye party" every evening in his handsome house on Twenty-third Street. The four men and the three young girls in the other room were the residue of this party, which was to be the last.

Arthur Wye, wearing the brand-new uniform, red stripes and facings, of flying artillery, rose also; John Casson buttoned his cavalry jacket, grumbling, and stood heavily erect, a colossus in blue and yellow.

"You have the devil's luck, Berkley," he said without bitterness.

"I need it."

"So you do, poor old boy. But--God! you play like a professional."

Wye yawned, thrust his strong, thin hands into his trousers pockets, and looked stupidly at the ceiling.

"I wish to heaven they'd start our battery," he said vacantly.

"I'm that sick of Hamilton!"

Casson grumbled again, settling his debts with Berkley.

"Everybody has the devil's own luck except the poor God-forsaken cavalry. Billy Cortlandt goes tomorrow, your battery is under orders, but nobody cares what happens to the cavalry. And they're the eyes and ears of an army----"

"They're the heels and tail of it," observed Berkley, "and the artillery is the rump."

"Shut up, you sneering civilian!"

"I'm shutting up--shop--unless anybody cares to try one last cold hand--" He caught the eye of the girl at the piano and smiled pallidly. "'_Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames_!' Also I have them all scared to death, Miss Carew--the volunteer army of our country is taking water."

"It doesn't taste like water," said the pretty singer on the sofa, stretching out her bubbling glass, "try it yourself, Mr. Berkley."

They went toward the music room; Cortlandt seated himself on top of the piano. He looked rather odd there in his zouave jacket, red trousers, white-gaitered legs hanging.

"Oh the Zou-zou-zou!

Oh the Zou-zou-zou!

Oh the boys of the bully Zouaves!"

he hummed, swinging his legs vigorously. "Ladies and gentlemen, it's all over but the shooting. Arthur, I saw your battery horses; they belong in a glue factory. How are you going to save your guns when the rebs come after you?"

"God knows, especially if the Zouaves support us," replied Wye, yawning again. Then, rising:

"I've got to get back to that cursed fort. I'll escort anybody who'll let me."

"One more glass, then," said Cortlandt. "Berkley, fill the parting cup! Ladies of the Canterbury, fair sharers of our hospitality who have left the triumphs of the drama to cheer the unfortunate soldier on his war-ward way, I raise my glass and drink to each Terpsichorean toe which, erstwhile, was pointed skyward amid the

thunder of metropolitan plaudits, and which now demurely taps my flattered carpet. Gentlemen--soldiers and civilians--I give you three toasts! Miss Carew, Miss Lynden, Miss Trent! Long may they dance! Hurrah!"

"Get on the table," said Casson amid the cheering, and climbed up, spurs jingling, glass on high.

"Will it hold us all?" inquired Letty Lynden, giving her hands to Berkley, who shrugged and swung her up beside him. "Hurrah for the Zouaves!" she cried; "Hurrah for Billy Cortlandt!--Oh, somebody spilled champagne all over me!"

"Hurrah for the artillery!" shouted Arthur Wye, vigorously cheering himself and waving his glass, to the terror of lone Carew, who attempted to dodge the sparkling rain in vain.

"Arthur, you look like a troop of trained mice," observed Berkley gravely. "Has anybody a toy cannon and a little flag?"

Wye descended with a hop, sprang astride a chair, and clattered around the room, imitating his drill-master.

"Attention! By the right of batteries, break into sections, trot.

Mar-r-rch! Attention-n-n! By section from the right of

batteries--front into column. Mar-r-rch!"

"By section from the right, front into column, march!" repeated Cortlandt, jumping down from the table and seizing another chair. "Everybody mount a chair!" he shouted. "This is the last artillery drill of the season. Line up there, Letty! It won't hurt your gown. Berkley'll get you another, anyway! Now, ladies and gentlemen, sit firmly in your saddles. Caissons to the rear--march! Caissons, left about--pieces forward--march!"

Wye's chair buckled and he came down with a splintering crash; Casson galloped madly about, pretending his chair had become unmanageable. It, also, ultimately collapsed, landed him flat on his back, whence he surveyed the exercises of the *_haute ecole_* in which three flushed and laughing young girls followed the dashing lead of Cortlandt, while Berkley played a cavalry canter on the piano with one hand and waved his cigar in the other.

Later, breathless, they touched glasses to the departing volunteers, to each other, to the ladies ("God bless them! Hear! He-ah!"), to the war, to every regiment going, to each separate battery horse and mule in Arthur's section. And then began on the guns,

"I prophesy a quick reunion!" said Berkley. "Here's to it! Full glasses!"

"Speech! Speech--you nimble-witted, limber-legged prophet!" roared
John Casson, throwing a pack of cards at Berkley. "Read the cards
for us!"

Berkley very gracefully caught a handful, and sorting them, began
impromptu:

"Diamonds for you,
Little Miss Carew,
Strung in a row,
Tied in a bow--
What would you do
If they came true?

"What can it be?
Hearts! for Miss Letty--
Sweethearts and beaux,
Monarchs in rows,
Knives on their knees--
Choose among these!

"Clubs now, I see!
Ace! for Miss Betty--
Clubman and swell,

Soldier as well.

Yes, he's all three;

Who can he be?

"Ione, be kind

To monarch and knave,

But make up your mind

To make 'em behave.

And when a man finds you

The nicest he's met, he

Is likely to marry you,

Letty and Betty!"

Tremendous cheering greeted these sentiments; three more cheers were proposed and given for the Canterbury.

"Home of the 'ster arts, m-music an' 'r' drama-r-r--" observed

Casson hazily--"I'm going home."

Nobody seemed to hear him.

"Home--ser-weet home," he repeated sentimentally--"home among the horses--where some Roman-nosed, camel-backed, slant-eared nag is probably waitin' to kick daylight out'r me! Ladies, farewell!" he added, tripping up on his spurs and waving his hand vaguely.

"Cav'lry's eyes 'n' ears 'f army! 'Tain't the hind legs' No--_no_!
I'm head 'n' ears--army! 'n' I wan' t' go home."

For a while he remained slanting against the piano, thoughtfully attempting to pry out the strings; then Wye returned from putting Miss Carew and Miss Trent into a carriage.

"You come to the fort with me," he said. "That'll sober you. I sleep near the magazine."

Berkley's face looked dreadfully battered and white, but he was master of himself, careful of his equilibrium, and very polite to everybody.

"You're--hic!--killin' yourself," said Cortlandt, balancing himself carefully in the doorway.

"Don't put it that way," protested Berkley. "I'm trying to make fast time, that's all. I'm in a hurry."

The other wagged his head: "_You_ won't last long if you keep this up. The--hic!--trouble with you is that you can't get decently drunk. You just turn blue and white. That's what's--matter--_you_! And it kills the kind of--hic!--of man you are. B-b'lieve me," he added shedding tears, "I'm fon' 'v' you,

Ber--hic!--kley."

He shed a few more scalding tears, waved his hand in resignation, bowed his head, caught sight of his own feet, regarded them with surprise.

"Whose?" he inquired naively.

"Yours," said Berkley reassuringly. "They don't want to go to bed."

"Put 'em to bed!" said Cortlandt in a stern voice. "No business wand'ring 'round here this time of night!"

So Berkley escorted Cortlandt to bed, bowed him politely into his room, and turned out the gas as a precaution.

Returning, he noticed the straggling retreat of cavalry and artillery, arms fondly interlaced; then, wandering back to the other room in search of his hat, he became aware of Letty Lynden, seated at the table.

Her slim, childish body lay partly across the table, her cheek was pillowed on one outstretched arm, the fingers of which lay loosely around the slender crystal stem of a wine-glass.

"Are you asleep?" he asked. And saw that she was.

So he roamed about, hunting for something or other--he forgot what--until he found it was her mantilla. Having found it, he forgot what he wanted it for and, wrapping it around his shoulders, sat down on the sofa, very silent, very white, but physically master of the demoralisation that sharpened the shadows under his cheek-bones and eyes.

"I guess," he said gravely to himself, "that I'd better become a gambler. It's--a--very, ve--ry good 'fession--no," he added cautiously, "_per_--fession--" and stopped short, vexed with his difficulties of enunciation.

He tried several polysyllables; they went better. Then he became aware of the mantilla on his shoulders.

"Some time or other," he said to himself with precision, "that little dancer girl ought to go home."

He rose steadily, walked to the table:

"Listen to me, you funny little thing," he said.

No answer.

The childlike curve of the cheek was flushed; the velvet-fringed lids lay close. For a moment he listened to the quiet breathing, then touched her arm lightly.

The girl stirred, lifted her head, straightened up, withdrawing her fingers from the wine-glass.

"Everybody's gone home," he said. "Do you want to stay here all night?"

She rose, rubbing her eyes with the backs of her hands, saw the mantilla he was holding, suffered him to drop it on, her shoulders, standing there sleepy and acquiescent. Then she yawned.

"Are you going with me, Mr. Berkley?"

"I'll--yes. I'll see you safe."

She yawned again, laid a small hand on his arm, and together they descended the stairs, opened the front door, and went out into Twenty-third Street. He scarcely expected to find a hack at that

hour, but there was one; and it drove them to her lodgings on Fourth Avenue, near Thirteenth Street. Spite of her paint and powder she seemed very young and very tired as she stood by the open door, looking drearily at the gray pallor over the roofs opposite, where day was breaking.

"Will you--come in?"

He had prepared to take his leave; he hesitated.

"I think I will," he said. "I'd like to see you with your face washed."

Her room was small, very plain, very neat. On the bed lay folded a white night gown; a pair of knitted pink slippers stood close together on the floor beside it. There was a cheap curtain across the alcove; she drew it, turned, looked at him; and slowly her oval face crimsoned.

"You needn't wash your face," he said very gently.

She crept into the depths of a big arm-chair and lay back watching him with inscrutable eyes.

He did not disturb her for a while. After a few moments he got up and walked slowly about, examining the few inexpensive ornaments on wall and mantel; turned over the pages of an album, glanced at a newspaper beside it, then came back and stood beside her chair.

"Letty?"

She opened her eyes.

"I suppose that this isn't the--first time."

"No."

"It's not far from it, though." She was silent, but her eyes dropped.

He sat down on the padded arm of the chair.

"Do you know how much money I've made this week?" he said gaily.

She looked up at him, surprised, and shook her head; but her velvet eyes grew wide when he told her.

"I won it fairly," he said. "And I'm going to stake it all on one last bet."

[Illustration: "I won it fairly, and I'm going to stake it all on one last bet."]

"On--what?"

"On--_you_. Now, _what_ do you think of that, you funny little thing?"

"How--do you mean, Mr. Berkley?" He looked down into the eyes of a hurt child.

"It goes into the bank in your name--if you say so."

"For--what?"

"I don't know," he said serenely, "but I am betting it will go for rent, and board, and things a girl needs--_when she has no man to ask them of--and nothing to pay for them_."

"You mean no man---excepting--you?"

"No," he said wearily, "I'm not trying to buy you."

She crimsoned. "I thought--then why do you----"

"Why? Good God, child! _I_ don't know! How do I know why I do anything? I've enough left for my journey. Take this and try to behave yourself if you can--in the Canterbury and out of it! . . .
And buy a new lock for that door of yours. Good night."

She sprang up and laid a detaining hand on his sleeve as he reached the hallway.

"Mr. Berkley! I--I can't----"

He said, smiling: "My manners are really better than that----"

"I didn't mean----"

"You ought to. Don't let any man take his leave in such a manner. Men believe a woman to be what she thinks she is. Think well of yourself. And go to bed. I never saw such a sleepy youngster in my life! Good night, you funny, sleepy little thing."

"Mr. Berkley--I can't take--accept---"

"Oh, listen to her!" he said, disgusted. "Can't I make a bet with my own money if I want to? I am betting; and you are holding the stakes. It depends on how you use them whether I win or lose."

"I don't understand--I don't, truly," she stammered; "d-do you wish me to--leave--the Canterbury? Do you--what is it you wish?"

"You know better than I do. I'm not advising you. Where is your home? Why don't you go there? You have one somewhere, I suppose, haven't you?"

"Y-yes; I had."

"Well--where is it?"

"In Philadelphia."

"Couldn't you stand it?" he inquired with a sneer.

"No." She covered her face with her hands.

"Trouble?"

"Y-yes."

"Man?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Won't they take you back?"

"I--haven't written."

"Write. Home is no stupider than the Canterbury. Will you write?"

She nodded, hiding her face.

"Then--_that's_ settled. Meanwhile--" he took both her wrists and drew away her clinging hands:

"I'd rather like to win this bet because--the odds are all against me." He smiled, letting her hands swing back and hang inert at her sides.

But she only closed her eyes and shook her head, standing there,
slim and tear-stained in her ruffled, wine-stained dinner dress.
And, watching her, he retreated, one step after another, slowly;
and slowly closed the door, and went out into the dawn, weary,
haggard, the taste of life bitter in his mouth.

"What a spectacle," he sneered, referring to himself, "the vicious
god from the machine! Chorus of seraphim. Apotheosis of little
Miss Turveydrop----"

He swayed a trine as he walked, but it was not from the wine.

A policeman eyed him unfavourably,

"No," said Berkley, "I'm not drunk. You think I am. But I'm not.
And I'm too tired to tell you how I left my happy, happy home."

In the rosy gray of the dawn he sat down on the steps of his new
lodgings and gazed quietly into space.

"_This_ isn't going to help," he said. "I can stand years of it
yet. And that's much too long."

He brooded for a few moments.

"I hope she doesn't write me again. I can't stand everything."

He got up with an ugly, oblique glance at the reddening sky.

"I'm what he's made me--and I've got to let her alone. . . . Let her alone. I--" He halted, laid his hand heavily on the door, standing so, motionless.

"If I--go--near her, he'll tell her what I am. If he didn't, I'd have to tell her. There's no way--anywhere--for me. And he made me so. . . . And--by God! it's in me--in me--to--to--if she writes again--" He straightened up, turned the key calmly, and let himself in.

Burgess was asleep, but Berkley went into his room and awoke him, shining a candle in his eyes.

"Burgess!"

"S-sir?"

"Suppose you knew you could never marry a woman. Would you keep

away from her? Or would you do as much as you could to break her heart first?"

Burgess yawned: "Yes, sir."

"You'd do all you could?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a long silence; then Berkley laughed. "They drowned the wrong pup," he said pleasantly. "Good night."

But Burgess was already asleep again.

CHAPTER IX

And now at last she knew what it was she feared. For she was beginning to understand that this man was utterly unworthy, utterly insensible, without character, without one sympathetic trait that appealed to anything in her except her senses.

She understood it now, lying there alone in her room, knowing it to be true, admitting it in all the bitter humiliation of self-contempt. But even in the light of this new self-knowledge

her inclination for him seemed a thing so unreasonable, so terrible, that, confused and terrified by the fear of spiritual demoralisation, she believed that this bewildering passion was all that he had ever evoked in her, and fell sick in mind and body for the shame of it.

A living fever was on her night and day; disordered memories of him haunted her, waking; defied her, sleeping; and her hatred for what he had awakened in her grew as her blind, childish longing to see him grew, leaving no peace for her.

What kind of love was that?--founded on nothing, nurtured on nothing, thriving on nothing except what her senses beheld in him. Nothing higher, nothing purer, nothing more exalted had she ever learned of him than what her eyes saw; and they had seen only a man in his ripe youth, without purpose, without ideals, taking carelessly of the world what he would one day return to it--the material, born in corruption, and to corruption doomed.

It was night she feared most. By day there were duties awaiting, or to be invented. Also, sometimes, standing on her steps, she could hear the distant sound of drums, catch a glimpse far to the eastward of some regiment bound South, the long rippling line of bayonets, a flutter of colour where the North was passing on God's own errand. And love of country became a passion.

Stephen came sometimes, but his news of Berkley was always indefinite, usually expressed with a shrug and emphasised in silences.

Colonel Arran was still in Washington, but he wrote her every day, and always he asked whether Berkley had come. She never told him.

Like thousands and thousands of other women in New York she did what she could for the soldiers, contributing from her purse, attending meetings, making havelocks, ten by eight, for the soldiers' caps, rolling bandages, scraping lint in company with other girls of her acquaintance, visiting barracks and camps and "soldiers' rests," sending endless batches of pies and cakes and dozens of jars of preserves from her kitchen to the various distributing depots.

Sainte Ursula's Church sent out a call to its parishioners; a notice was printed in all the papers requesting any women of the congregation who had a knowledge of nursing to meet at the rectory for the purpose of organisation. And Ailsa went and enrolled herself as one who had had some hospital experience.

Sickness among the thousands of troops in the city there already was, also a few cases of gunshots in the accident wards incident on the carelessness or ignorance of raw volunteers. But as yet in the

East there had been no soldier wounded in battle, no violent death except that of the young colonel of the 1st Fire Zouaves, shot down at Alexandria.

So there was no regular hospital duty asked of Ailsa Paige, none required; and she and a few other women attended a class of instruction conducted by her own physician, Dr. Benton, who explained the simpler necessities of emergency cases and coolly predicted that there would be plenty of need for every properly instructed woman who cared to volunteer.

So the ladies of Sainte Ursula's listened very seriously; and some had enough of it very soon, and some remained longer, and finally only a small residue was left--quiet, silent, attentive women of various ages who came every day to hear what Dr. Benton had to tell them, and write it down in their little morocco notebooks. And these, after a while, became the Protestant sisterhood of Sainte Ursula, and wore, on duty, the garb of gray with the pectoral scarlet heart.

May went out with the booming of shotted guns beyond the, Southern horizon, amid rumours of dead zouaves and cavalrymen somewhere beyond Alexandria. And on that day the 7th Regiment returned to garrison the city, and the anxious city cheered its return, and people slept more soundly for it, though all day long the streets echoed with the music of troops departing, and of regiments

parading for a last inspection before the last good-byes were said.

Berkley saw some of this from his window. Never perfectly sober now, he seldom left his rooms except at night; and all day long he read, or brooded, or lay listless, or as near drunk as he ever could be, indifferent, neither patient nor impatient with a life he no longer cared enough about to either use or take.

There were intervals when the deep despair within him awoke quivering; instants of fierce grief instantly controlled, throttled; moments of listless relaxation when some particularly contemptible trait in Burgess faintly amused him, or some attempted invasion of his miserable seclusion provoked a sneer or a haggard smile, or perhaps an uneasiness less ignoble, as when, possibly, the brief series of letters began and ended between him and the dancing girl of the Canterbury.

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"Could you come for me after the theatre this evening?

"LETITIA LYNDEN."

"DEAR LETTY:

"I'm afraid I couldn't.

"Very truly yours,

"P. O. BERKLEY."

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"Am I not to see you again? I think perhaps you might care to hear that I have been doing what you wished ever since that night. I have also written home, but nobody has replied. I don't think they want me now. It is a little lonely, being what you wish me to be. I thought you might come sometimes. Could you?"

"LETITIA LYNDEN."

"DEAR LETITIA:

"I seem to be winning my bet, but nobody can ever tell. Wait for a while and then write home again. Meantime, why not make bonnets? If you want to, I'll see that you get a chance.

"P. O. BERKLEY."

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"I don't know how. I never had any skill. I was assistant in a physician's office--once. Thank you for your kind and good offer--for all your goodness to me. I wish I could see you sometimes. You have been better to me than any man. Could I?"

"LETTY."

"DEAR LETTY:

"Why not try some physician's office?"

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"Do you wish me to? Would you see me sometimes if I left the Canterbury? It is so lonely--you don't know, Mr. Berkley, how lonely it is to be what you wish me to be. Please only come and speak to me.

"LETTY."

"DEAR LETTY:

"Here is a card to a nice doctor, Phineas Benton, M.D. I have not seen him in years; he remembers me as I was. You will not, of course, disillusion him. I've had to lie to him about you--and about myself. I've told him that I know your family in Philadelphia, that they asked me about the chances of a position here for you as an assistant in a physician's office, and that now you had come on to seek for such a position. Let me know how the lie turns out.

"P. O. BERKLEY."

A fortnight later came her last letter:

"DEAR MR. BERKLEY:

"I have been with Dr. Benton nearly two weeks now. He took me at once. He is such a good man! But--I

don't know--sometimes he looks at me and looks at me as though he suspected what I am--and I feel my cheeks getting hot, and I can scarcely speak for nervousness; and then he always smiles so pleasantly and speaks so courteously that I know he is too kind and good to suspect.

"I hold sponges and instruments in minor operations, keep the office clean, usher in patients, offer them smelling salts and fan them, prepare lint, roll bandages--and I know already how to do all this quite well.

I think he seems pleased with me. He is so very kind to me. And I have a little hall bedroom in his house, very tiny but very neat and clean; and I have my meals with his housekeeper, an old, old woman who is very deaf and very pleasant.

"I don't go out because I don't know where to go.

I'm afraid to go near the Canterbury--afraid to meet anybody from there. I think I would die if any man I ever saw there ever came into Dr. Benton's office.

The idea of that often frightens me. But nobody has come. And I sometimes do go out with Dr. Benton.

He is instructing a class of ladies in the principles of hospital nursing, and lately I have gone with him to hold things for him while he demonstrates. And once, when he was called away suddenly, I remained with the class alone, and I was not very nervous, and I answered all

their questions for them and showed them how things ought to be done. They were so kind to me; and one very lovely girl came to me afterward and thanked me and said that she, too, had worked a little as a nurse for charity, and asked me to call on her.

"I was so silly--do you know I couldn't see her for the tears, and I couldn't speak--and I couldn't let go of her hands. I wanted to kiss them, but I was ashamed.

"Some day do you think I might see you again? I am what you have asked me to be. I never wanted to be anything else. They will not believe that at home because they had warned me, and I was such a fool--and perhaps you won't believe me--but I didn't know what I was doing; I didn't want to be what I became--This is really true, Mr. Berkley. Sometime may I see you again?

Yours sincerely,

"LETITIA A. LYNDEN."

He had replied that he would see her some day, meaning not to do so. And there it had rested; and there, stretched on his sofa, he rested, the sneer still edging his lips, not for her but for himself.

"She'd have made some respectable man a good--mistress," he said.

"Here is a most excellent mistress, spoiled, to make a common-place nurse! . . . _Gaude! Maria Virgo; gaudent proenomine molles auriculoe. . . . Gratis poenitet esse probum_. Burgess!"

"Sir?"

"What the devil are you scratching for outside my door?"

"A letter, sir."

"Shove it under, and let me alone."

The letter appeared, cautiously inserted under the door, and lay there very white on the floor. He eyed it, scowling, without curiosity, turned over, and presently became absorbed in the book he had been reading:

"Zarathustra asked Ahura-Mazda: 'Heavenly, Holiest, Pure, when a pure man dies where does his soul dwell during that night?'

"Then answered Ahura-Mazda: 'Near his head it sits itself down. On this night his soul sees as much joy as the living world possesses.'

"And Zarathustra asked: 'Where dwells the soul throughout the second night after the body's death?'

"Then answered Ahura-Mazda: 'Near to his head it sits itself down.'

"Zarathustra spake: 'Where stays the soul of a pure man throughout the third night, O Heavenly, Holiest, Pure?'

"And thus answered Ahura-Mazda, Purest, Heavenly: 'When the Third Night turns Itself to Light, the soul arises and goes forward; and a wind blows to meet it; a sweet-scented one, more sweet-scented than other winds.'

"And in that wind there cometh to meet him His Own Law in the body of a maid, one beautiful, shining, with shining arms; one powerful, well-grown, slender, with praiseworthy body; one noble, with brilliant face, as fair in body as the loveliest.

"And to her speaks the soul of the pure man, questioning her who she might truly be. And thus replies to him His Own Law, shining, dove-eyed, loveliest: 'I am thy thoughts and works; I am thine own Law of thine own Self. Thou art like me, and I am like thee in goodness, in beauty, in all that I appear to thee. Beloved, come!'

"And the soul of the pure man takes one step and is in the First Paradise, Humata; and takes a second step, and is in the Second Paradise, Hukhta; and takes a third step, and is in the Third Paradise, Hvarsta.

"And takes one last step into the Eternal Lights for ever."

His haggard eyes were still fixed vacantly on the printed page, but he saw nothing now. Something in the still air of the room had arrested his attention--something faintly fresh--an evanescent hint of perfume.

Suddenly the blood surged up in his face; he half rose, turned where he lay and looked back at the letter on the floor. "Damn it," he said. And rising heavily, he went to it, picked it up, and broke the scented seal.

"Will you misunderstand me, Mr. Berkley? They say that the pages of friendship are covered with records of misunderstandings.

"We were friends. Can it not be so again? I have thought so long and so steadily about it that I no longer exactly know whether I may venture to write to you or whether the only thing decently left me is silence, which for the second time I am breaking now, because I cannot believe that I offered my friendship to such a man

as you have said you are. It is not in any woman to do it.

Perhaps it is self-respect that protests, repudiates, denies what you have said to me of yourself; and perhaps it is a sentiment less austere. I can no longer judge.

"And now that I have the courage--or effrontery--to write you once more, will you misconstrue my letter--and my motive? If I cannot be reconciled to what I hear of you--if what I hear pains, frightens me out of a justifiable silence which perhaps you might respect, will you respect my motive for breaking it the less? I do not know. But the silence is now broken, and I must endure the consequences.

"Deep unhappiness I have never known; but I recognise it in others when I see it, and would aid always if I could. Try to understand me.

"But despair terrifies me--I who never have known it--and I do not understand how to meet it, how to cope with it in others, what to say or do. Yet I would help if help is possible. Is it?

"I think you have always thought me immature, young in experience, negligible as to wisdom, of an intellectual capacity inconsequential.

"These are the facts: I was married when I was very young, and I have known little of such happiness; but I have met sorrow and have conquered it, and I have seen bitter hours, and have overcome them, and I have been tempted, and have prevailed. Have you done these things?"

"As for wisdom, if it comes only with years, then I have everything yet to learn. Yet it seems to me that in the charity wards of hospitals, in the city prisons, in the infirmary, the asylum--even the too brief time spent there has taught me something of human frailty and human sorrow. And if I am right or wrong, I do not know, but to me sin has always seemed mostly a sickness of the mind. And it is a shame to endure it or to harshly punish it if there be a cure. And if this is so, what you may have done, and what others may have done to you, cannot be final.

"My letter is longer than I meant it, but I had a great need to speak to you. If you still think well of me, answer me. Answer in the way it pleases you best. But answer--if you still think well of me.

"AILSA PAIGE."

A touch of rose still tinted the sky overhead, but already the lamp lighters were illuminating the street lamps as he came to London Terrace--that quaint stretch of old-time houses set back from the

street, solemnly windowed, roofed, and pilastered; decorously screened behind green trees and flowering bushes ringed by little lawns of emerald.

For a moment, after entering the iron gateway and mounting the steps, he stood looking up at her abode. Overhead the silken folds of the flag hung motionless in the calm evening air; and all the place about him was sweet with the scent of bridal-wreath and early iris.

Then, at his tardy summons, the door of her house opened to him. He went in and stood in the faded drawing-room, where the damask curtain folds were drawn against the primrose dusk and a single light glimmered like a star high among the pendant prisms of the chandelier.

Later a servant came and gave the room more light. Then he waited for a long while. And at last she entered.

Her hands were cold--he noticed it as the fingers touched his, briefly, and were withdrawn. She had scarcely glanced at him, and she had not yet uttered a word when they were seated. It lay with him, entirely, so far.

"What a lazy hound I have been," he said, smiling; "I have no

excuses to save my hide--no dogs ever have. Are you well, Ailsa?"

She made the effort: "Yes, perfectly. I fear--" Her eyes rested on his marred and haggard face; she said no more because she could not.

He made, leisurely, all proper and formal inquiries concerning the Craigs and those he had met there, mentioned pleasantly his changed fortunes; spoke of impending and passing events, of the war, of the movement of troops, of the chances for a battle, which the papers declared was imminent.

Old Jonas shuffled in with the Madeira and a decanter of brandy, it being now nearly eight o'clock.

Later, while Berkley was still carelessly bearing the burden of conversation, the clock struck nine times; and in another incredibly brief interval, it struck ten.

He started to rise, and encountered her swiftly lifted eyes. And a flush grew and deepened on his face, and he resumed his place in silence. When again he was seated she drew, unconsciously, a long, deep breath, and inclined her head to listen. But Berkley had no more to say to her--and much that he must not say to her. And she waited a long while, eyes bent steadily on the velvet carpet at her feet.

The silence endured too long; she knew it, but could not yet break it, or the spell which cradled her tired heart, or the blessed surcease from the weariness of waiting.

Yet the silence was lasting too long, and must be broken quickly.

She looked up, startled, as he rose to take his leave. It was the only way, now, and she knew it. And, oh, the time had sped too fast for her, and her heart failed her for all the things that remained unsaid--all the kindness she had meant to give him, all the counsel, the courage, the deep sympathy, the deeper friendship.

But her hand lay limply, coldly in his; her lips were mute, tremulously curving; her eyes asked nothing more.

"Good night, Ailsa."

"Good night."

There was colour, still, in his marred young face, grace, still, in his body, in the slightly lowered head as he looked down at her.

"I must not come again, Ailsa."

Then her pulses died. "Why?"

"Because--I am afraid to love you."

It did not seem that she even breathed, so deathly still she stood.

"Is that---your reason?"

"Yes. I have no right to love you."

She could scarcely speak. "Is--friendship not enough, Mr. Berkley?"

"It is too late for friendship. You know it."

"That cannot be."

"Why, Ailsa?"

"Because it is friendship--mistaken friendship that moves you now in every word you say." She raised her candid gaze. "Is there no end to your self-murder? Do you still wish to slay yourself before my very eyes?"

"I tell you that there is nothing good left living in me:

"And if it were true; did you never hear of a resurrection?"

"I--warn you!"

"I hear your warning."

"You dare let me love you?"

Dry-lipped, voices half stifled by their mounting emotion, they stood closely confronted, paling under the effort of self-mastery. And his was giving way, threatening hers with every breath.

Suddenly in his altered face she saw what frightened her, and her hand suddenly closed in his; but he held it imprisoned.

"Answer me, Ailsa!"

"Please--" she said--"if you will let me go--I will answer--you----"

"What?"

"What you--ask."

Her breath was coming faster; her face, now white as a flower, now flushed, swam before him. Through the surging passion enveloping him he heard her voice as at a distance:

"If you will--let me go--I can tell you----"

"Tell me now!"

"Not--this way. . . . How can you care for me if----"

"I warned you, Ailsa! I told you that I am unfit to love you. No woman could ever marry _me_! No woman could even love me if she knew what I am! You understood that. I told you. And now--good God!--I'm telling you I love you--I can't let you go!--your hands!--the sweetness of them--the----"

"I--oh, it must not be--this way----"

"It _is_ this way!"

"I know--but please try to help.--I--I am not afraid to--love
you-----"

Her slender figure trembled against him; the warmth of her set him
afire. There was a scent of tears in her breath--a fragrance as
her body relaxed, yielded, embraced; her hands, her lids, her:
hair, her mouth, all his now, for the taking, as he took her into
his arms. But he only stared down at what lay there; and,
trembling, breathless, her eyes unclosed and she looked up blindly
into his flushed face.

"Because I--love you," she sighed, "I believe in all that--that I
have--never--seen--in you."

He looked back into her eyes, steadily:

"I am going mad over you, Ailsa. There is only destruction for you
in that madness. . . . Shall I let you go?"

"W-what?"

But the white passion in his face was enough; and, involuntarily
her lids shut it out. But she did not stir.

"I--warned you," he said again.

"I know. . . . Is it in you to--destroy--me?"

"God knows. . . . Yes, it is."

She scarcely breathed; only their hearts battled there in silence.

Then he said harshly:

"What else is there for us? You would not marry me."

"Ask me."

"You would not marry me if I told you----"

"What?"

"I will not tell you!"

"Are you--married?"

"No!"

"Then _tell_ me!"

"G-od! _No_! I can't throw _this_ hour away. I can't throw love away! I want you anyway--if you have the--courage!"

"Tell me. I promise to marry you anyway. I promise it, whatever you are! Tell me."

"I--" An ugly red-stained neck and forehead; his embrace suddenly hurt her so that she cried out faintly, but her hand closed on his.

"Tell me, tell me, _tell_ me!" she pleaded; "I know you are half crazed by something--some dreadful thing that has been done to you--" and ceased, appalled at the distorted visage he turned on her. His arms relaxed and fell away from her.

Released, she stood swaying as though stunned, pressed both hands to her eyes, then let her arms fall, inert.

For a moment they confronted one another; then he straightened up, squared his shoulders with a laugh that terrified her.

"No," he said, "I _won't_ tell you! You go on caring for me. I'm

beast enough to let you. Go on caring! Love me--if you're brave enough. . . . And I warn you now that I love you, and I don't care a damn how I do it! . . . Now you are frightened! . . . Very well--|----"

He swayed a little, swung blindly on his heel, and lurched out into the hall.

Mechanically she followed, halting in the doorway and resting against it, for it seemed as though her knees were giving way.

"Is that--to be the--end?" she whispered.

He turned and came swiftly back, took her in his arms, crushed her to him, kissed her lips again and again, fiercely.

"The end will be when you make an end," he said. "Make it now or never!"

His heart was beating violently against hers; her head had fallen a little back, lips slightly parted, unresponsive under his kiss, yet enduring--and at last burning and trembling to the verge of response----

And suddenly, passion-swept, breathless, she felt her self-control going, and she opened her eyes, saw hell in his, tore herself from his arms, and shrank, trembling, against the wall. He turned stupidly and opened the door, making his way out into the night. But she did not see him, for her burning face was hidden in her hands.

Drunk as though drugged, the echoes of passion still stirred his darker self, and his whirling thoughts pierced his heart like names, whispering, urging him to go back and complete the destruction he had begun--take her once more into his arms and keep her there through life, through death, till the bones of the blessed and the damned alike stirred in their graves at the last reveille.

To know that she, too, had been fighting herself--that she, too, feared passion, stirred every brutal fibre in him to a fiercer recklessness that halted him in his tracks under the calm stars. But what held him there was something else, perhaps what he believed had died in him; for he did not even turn again. And at last, through the dark and throbbing silence he moved on again at random, jaws set.

The mental strain was beginning to distort everything. Once or twice he laughed all to himself, nodding mysteriously, his tense white face stamped with a ghastly grimace of self-contempt. Then

an infernal, mocking curiosity stirred him:

What kind of a thing was he anyway? A moment since he had loosed the brute in himself, leaving it to her to re-chain or let it carry her with him to destruction. And yet he was too fastidious to marry her under false pretences!

"Gods of Laughter! What in hell--what sort of thing am I?" he asked aloud, and lurched on, muttering insanely to himself, laughing, talking under his breath, hearing nothing, seeing nothing but her wistful eyes, gazing sorrowfully out of the night.

At a dark crossing he ran blindly into a moving horse; was pushed aside by its cloaked rider with a curse; stood dazed, while his senses slowly returned--first, hearing--and his ears were filled with the hollow trample of many horses; then vision, and in the dark street before him he saw the column of shadowy horsemen riding slowly in fours, knee to knee, starlight sparkling on spur and bit and sabre guard.

Officers walked their lean horses beside the column. One among them drew bridle near him, calling out:

"Have you the right time?"

Berkley looked at his watch.

"Midnight."

"Thank you, friend."

Berkley stepped to the curb-stone: "What regiment is that?"

"Eighth New York."

"Leaving?"

"Going into camp. Yorkville."

Berkley said: "Do you want a damned fool?"

"The companies are full of fools. . . . We can stand a few first-class men. Come up to camp to-morrow, friend. If you can pass the surgeons I guess it will be all right."

And he prodded his tired horse forward along the slowly moving column of fours.

CHAPTER X

Her hatred and horror of him gave her no peace. Angry, incensed, at moments almost beside herself with grief and shame and self-contempt, she awaited the letter which he must write--the humble and hopeless effort for pardon which she never, never would answer or even in her own soul grant.

Day after day she brooded, intent, obsessed, fiercely pondering his obliteration.

But no letter came.

No letter came that week, nor Monday, nor at the end of the next week, nor the beginning of the next.

Wrath, at night, had dried her eyes where she lay crying in her humiliation; wrath diminished as the days passed; scorn became less rigid, anger grew tremulous. Then what was lurking near her pillow lifted a pallid head. Fear!

She waited. Wrath died, scorn died; there was not enough to dry her tears at night--a deeper, more hopeless humiliation had become the shame of forgiving him, of loneliness without him, of waiting

for his letter, heart sick--his letter that never came.

Letter after letter to him she destroyed, and fell ill of the tension, or perhaps of a heavy cold caught in the rain where she had walked for hours, aimlessly, unable to bear her longing and her desolation.

Dr. Benton attended her; the pretty volunteer nurse came to sit with her during convalescence.

The third week in June she was physically well enough to dress and go about the house. And on that day she came to her shameful decision.

She wrote him, waited a dreary week for an answer; wrote him again, waited two weeks; wrote him a third and last letter. No answer came. And she went dully about the task of forgetting.

About the middle of July she heard from Stephen that Berkley had enlisted in one of the new unattached cavalry companies, but which one he did not know. Also she learned that the 3rd Zouaves had their marching orders and would probably come to the city to receive their colours. Later she heard from the mayor, the common council, and from Major Lent; and prepared for the ceremony.

The ceremony was prettily impressive; Ailsa, Mrs. Craig, her daughters, Paige and Marye, and Camilla Lent wearing a bell button from Stephen's zouave jacket, stood on the lawn in front of Ailsa's house, escorted by Colonel Arran who had returned from Washington, with his commission, by the mayor of the city, and several red-faced, fat-paunched gentlemen of the common council, and by a young officer, Captain Hallam, who stood behind Ailsa and seemed unable to keep his handsome eyes off her.

Twenty-third Street was packed solid with people and all aflutter with flags under the July sun when the distant strains of military music and blue lines of police heralded the coming of the 3rd Zouaves.

Band crashing, raw, gray horses of field and staff-officers dancing, the regiment came swinging down the wide stony street,--a torrent of red and gold, a broad shaft of silvery bayonets;--and halted facing the group of ladies and officials.

Celia Craig looked down at her husband where he sat his great gray horse. Their last good-bye had already been said; he sat erect, calm, gazing quietly up at her through his gold-rimmed eye-glasses; from his blue sleeves' edge to the points of his shoulders glittered in twisted gold the six-fold arabesques of his rank.

The roar of cheers was dying away now; a girlish figure in white had moved forward to the edge of the lawn, carrying two standards in her arms, and her voice was very clear and sweet and perfectly audible to everybody;

"Colonel Craig, officers, and soldiers of the 3rd New York Zouaves; the ladies of the Church of Sainte Ursula have requested me, in their name, to present to you this set of colours. God guard them and you!

"Remember that, although these flags are now yours, they still remain ours. Your cause is ours. Your vows our vows. Your loyalty to God and country is part of our loyalty to God, to country, and to you."

She stood silent, pensive a moment; then stretched out her arms, a flag in either hand; and the Colonel rode straight up to where she stood, took the silken colours and handed them to the two colour-sergeants. Then, while an orderly advanced to the head of his horse, Colonel Craig dismounted and quietly ascended the steps beside the little group of ladies and city officials:

"On behalf of the officers and men of the 3rd New York Zouaves," he said, "I thank you. We are grateful. I think that we all mean to do our best.

"If we cannot, in the hour of trial, do all that is expected of us,
we will do all that is in us to do.

"It is very easy to dress a thousand men in uniform, and invest
them with the surroundings of military life; but it is not thus
alone that soldiers are made. It is only discipline; regular
steady, rigid discipline--that forms a soldier to be relied upon in
the hour of need.

"At present we are only recruits. So I ask, in justice to the
regiment, that you will not demand too much of us in the beginning.
We desire to learn; we desire most earnestly to deserve your
confidence. I can only say that we will try to prove ourselves not
unworthy guardians of these flags you have given us."

He bowed, turned to go, swung around sharply and looked at his wife.

"Good-bye, my darling," he said under his breath; and the next
moment he was in the saddle.

All the rest that Ailsa recollected distinctly was the deafening
outcrash of military music, the sustained cheering, the clatter of
hoofs, the moving column of red and gold--and Celia, standing there
under the July sun, her daughters' hands in hers.

So the 3rd Zouaves marched gaily away under their new silk flags to their transport at Pier No. 3, North River. But the next day another regiment received its colours and went, and every day or so more regiments departed with their brand-new colours; and after a little only friends and relatives remembered the 3rd Zouaves, and what was their colonel's name.

By the middle of July the transformation of the metropolis from a city into a vast military carnival was complete. Gaudy uniforms were no longer the exception; a madness for fantastic brilliancy seized the people; soldiers in all kinds of colours and all kinds of dress filled the streets. Hotels, shops, ferry-boats, stages, cars, swarmed with undisciplined troops of all arms of the service, clad in every sort of extravagant uniforms. Except for the more severe state uniform and the rarer uniform of National troops, eccentric costumes were the rule. It was a carnival of military absurdity. Regiments were continually entering the city, regiments were continually leaving it; regiments in transit disembarked overnight only to resume the southward journey by steamer or train; regiments in camp and barrack were completing organisation and being mustered in by United States officers. Gorgeous regiments paraded for inspection, for drill, for the reception of state and regimental colours; three-month troops were returning, bands madly playing; two- and three-year regiments leaving, drums beating frantically.

The bewildering variety of cut and colour in the uniforms of this vast army, which was being made to order, had been, in a measure, rendered comparatively homogeneous by the adoption of the regulation blue overcoat, but many a regiment wore its own pattern of overcoat, many a regiment went forward in civilian attire, without arms and equipment, on the assurance that these details were to be supplied in Washington.

The dress of almost every foreign army in Europe was represented among the regiments forming or in transit. The 79th Highlanders, it is true, discarded kilt and bagpipe on the eve of departure, marching in blouse and cap and breeks of army blue; but the 14th. Brooklyn departed in red cap and red breeches, the 1st and 2d Fire Zouaves discarded the Turkish fez only; the 5th, 9th, 10th Zouaves marched wearing fez and turban; and bizarre voltigeurs, foot chasseurs, hussars, lancers, rocket batteries in costume de fantasie poured southward,--no two regiments equipped and armed alike.

The city remained in painful suspense concerning its raw, multicoloured, and undisciplined army. Every few days arose rumours of a great battle fought on Virginia soil, corroborated by extras, denied next morning. During the last half of July such reports had been current daily, tightening the tension, frightening parents, wives, and sweethearts. Recent armed affrays had been called battles; the dead zouaves at Big Bethel, a dead trooper at

Alexandria sobered and silenced the street cheering. Yet, what a real battle might be, nobody really comprehended or even surmised.

To Ailsa Paige June and July passed like fevered dreams; the brief sweet spring had suddenly turned into summer in a single day--a strange, stifling, menacing summer full of heavy little thunder-storms which rolled crackling and banging up the Hudson amid vivid electric displays, leaving no coolness behind their trailing wake of rain.

Society was lingering late in town--if the few nebulous, unorganised, and scattered social groups could be called society--small coteries drawn temporarily together through accident of environment, inherited family acquaintance, traditional, material, or religious interest, and sometimes by haphazard intellectual compatibility.

In the city, and in Ailsa's little world, the simple social routine centring in Sainte Ursula's and the Assembly in winter, and in Long Branch and Saratoga in summer, had been utterly disorganised. Very few of her friends had yet left for the country; nor had she made any arrangements for this strange, unreal summer, partly because, driven to find relief from memory in occupation, she was devoting herself very seriously to the medical instruction under Dr. Benton; partly because she did not consider it a fitting time to seek the coolness and luxury of inland spa or seaside pier.

Colonel Arran had brought back with him from Washington a Captain Hallam, a handsome youngster who wore his cavalry uniform to perfection and who had become instantly attentive to Ailsa,--so attentive that before she realised it he was a regular visitor at her house, appropriating the same chair that Berkley always had--Berkley!----

At the memory she closed her eyes instinctively. The wound throbbed,

"What is the matter, Mrs. Paige?" inquired Captain Hallam anxiously. "Are you faint?"

She opened her eyes and smiled in pretence of surprise at such a question; and Hallam muttered: "I thought you seemed rather pale all of a sudden." Then he brightened up and went gaily on with what he had been saying:

"We've got nine full companies already, and the 10th, K, is an independent company which we're taking in to complete our organisation. Colonel Arran and I stopped in Philadelphia to inspect Colonel Rush's regiment of lancers--the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry--because the French officers on McClellan's staff have put it into his head that he needs lancers----"

"Is Colonel Arran's regiment to carry lances?" interrupted Ailsa in surprise.

Hallam nodded, laughing: "We recruited as light cavalry, armed with sabre and pistol, but General McClellan has ordered that we carry the lance in addition. The department had none to issue until the foreign samples arrived. We are ordered to carry a lance of the Austrian pattern, nine feet long with an eleven-inch, three-edged blade; the staff of Norway fir about an inch and a quarter through, with ferrule and counter poise at the heel. Do I make myself clear, Mrs. Paige?"

Ailsa, thinking of Berkley, flushed slightly and nodded.

"There'll be a scarlet swallow-tailed pennon on the end just below the blade point. The whole affair will weigh about five pounds," concluded Hallam, rising to take his leave; "and I've got to be off to camp."

"Must you go, Captain Hallam?"

"I really must. That K Company is due in camp this evening, and I expect our uniforms and equipments will be delivered in the morning. Are you coming to see us off, Mrs. Paige?"

"When do you go? Colonel Arran said nothing about going."

"Oh, I expect we'll be on our way before very long. We are not in the best of shape yet; that's not to be expected. But there's a sad lack of cavalry in Washington, and they may want us to go whether we're ready or not. They sent off a regiment that had neither arms nor uniforms and couldn't even keep step, the other day. I've an idea we are going pretty soon." He took Ailsa's offered hand, looked at her a little earnestly, smiled in self-satisfaction, and went his way.

Later in the week he came back for a few moments; and all through the week he continued to come back for a few moments whenever he had an hour's leave.

And every time he took his leave his smile became less nervous and more confident.

She was very unhappy; devotion to Dr. Benton's class helped; devotion to Celia in her brief visits to Brooklyn helped, too; devotion to others, to prayer, all helped as long as it was devotion of some sort.

And now this young, blue-eyed, blonde-haired fellow was on the edge

of offering to devote himself to her. She knew it, wondered whether this was her refuge from care. And when he did, at last, she was quietly prepared to answer.

"Captain Hallam," she said slowly, "I do like you. I don't know whether I could ever learn to love you. I am not very happy; it might influence my judgment. If you are willing to wait until I know more about myself----"

Oh, he would wait! Certainly. Meanwhile would she wear his ring--not exactly an engagement--unless she was willing--but----

She hesitated. Lonelier than she had ever been in all her life, no longer self-sufficient, wistfully hopeless, needing to devote herself absolutely to something or somebody, she hesitated. But that evening when Hallam came with his ring she could not bring herself to accept what she now seemed to be most deeply in need of--the warm, eager, complacent affection that he laid at her feet. She was not yet able--could not; and the desolate memories of Berkley set the wound aching anew. . . . No, she could promise nothing to this young fellow--nothing yet. . . . Perhaps, in the future--as time passed--she might venture to wear his ring, and see what happened to her. But she would not promise--she would not talk of marrying him. . . . And cried herself to sleep over the memory of Berkley, and his vileness, and his heartless wickedness, and his ignoble love that had left her so ashamed, so humiliated,

so cruelly crushed for ever. And all night long she dreamed of Berkley and of his blessed nearness; and the sweetness of her dream troubled her profoundly. She sat up, still asleep, her straining throat whispering his name, her arms outstretched, blindly searching the darkness for him, until suddenly awake, she realised what she was doing, and dropped back among her pillows.

All that day the city was filled with rumours of a great battle fought in Virginia. The morning's papers hailed it with triumphant head-lines and columns of praise and thanksgiving for a great victory won. But at night the stunned city knew that Bull Run had been fought and lost, and the Confederacy was at the gates of Washington.

CHAPTER XI

In a city where thousands and thousands of women were now organising relief work for the troops already in the field, Ailsa Paige had been among the earliest to respond to the call for a meeting at the Church of the Puritans. Here she had left her name for enrolment with Mrs. Gerard Stuyvesant.

Later, with Mrs. Marquand, Mrs. Aspinwall, Mrs. Astor, and Mrs. Hamilton Fish, and a hundred others, she had signed the call for the great mass-meeting; had acted on one of the subcommittees chosen from among the three thousand ladies gathered at the

Institute; had served with Mrs. Schuyler on the board of the Central Relief Association; had been present at the inception of the Sanitary Commission and its adjunct, the Allotment Commission; had contributed to the Christian Commission, six thousand of whose delegates were destined to double the efficiency of the armies of the Union.

Then Sainte Ursula's Sisterhood, organised for field as well as hospital service, demanded all her energies. It was to be an emergency corps; she had hesitated to answer the call, hesitated to enroll for this rougher service, and, troubled, had sought counsel from Mr. Dodge and Mr. Bronson of the Allotment Commission, and from Dr. Agnew of the Sanitary Commission.

Dr. Agnew wrote to Dr. Benton:

"Mrs. Paige is a very charming and very sweet little lady, excellently equipped by experience to take the field with Sainte Ursula's Sisterhood, but self-distrustful and afraid of her own behaviour on a battle-field where the emergency corps might be under fire. In this sort of woman I have every confidence."

The next day Ailsa enrolled; arranged her household affairs so that she could answer any summons at a few hours' notice; and went to bed dead tired, and slept badly, dreaming of dead men. The morning sun found her pale and depressed. She had decided to destroy

Berkley's letters. She burned all, except one; then went to her class work.

Dr. Benton's class was very busy that morning, experimenting on the doctor's young assistant with bandages, ligatures, lint, and splints. Letty, wearing only her underclothes, lay on the operating table, her cheek resting on her bared arm, watching Ailsa setting a supposed compound fracture of the leg, and, at intervals, quietly suggesting the proper methods.

Autumn sunshine poured through the windows gilding the soft gray garb of Sainte Ursula's nursing sisterhood which all now wore on duty.

The girl on the table lay very still, now and then directing or gently criticising the well-intended operations on limb and body. And after the allotted half hour had struck, she sat up, smiling at Ailsa, and, slipping to the floor, dressed rapidly, talking all the while in her pretty, gentle way about bandages and bones and fractures and dislocations.

A few minutes after she had completed dressing and was standing before the glass, smoothing the dark, silky masses of her hair, Dr. Benton arrived, absent-eyed, preoccupied at first, then in a fidgety humour which indicated something was about to happen. It happened.

"Could any lady get ready in time to take the noon train for Washington?" he asked abruptly.

There was a startled silence; the call had come at last.

Mrs. Rutherford said quietly: "I will go. But I must see my husband and children first. I could be ready by to-morrow, if that will do."

Another--a young girl--said: "I could not leave my mother at an hour's notice. She is ill. Would tomorrow do, Dr. Benton?"

"I--think I can go to-day," said Ailsa in a low voice.

"Our quota is to be two nurses," said the doctor. But no other lady could possibly leave before the morrow; and it was, after all, scarcely fair to expect it of women with families to be provided for and home responsibilities to be arranged.

"I could go to-day--if I may be permitted," said the doctor's young assistant, timidly.

He swung around and scowled at her, lips compressed, eyes gleaming

through his spectacles:

"You are not asked to go, Miss Lynden."

"I--thought----"

"Do you want to go?"

"If Mrs. Paige is going--alone----"

Ailsa looked at her, gratefully surprised, but smiled her thanks.

"If Miss Lynden may come, Dr. Benton, I would be very glad. May she?"

"Miss Lynden is not a member of Sainte Ursula's congregation," he said drily. "She's my--rather valuable--assistant."

"She has been to church with me several times," said Ailsa. "I have spoken to her about becoming a communicant of Sainte Ursula's, and she desired to begin her instruction in October----"

"But, confound it!--I want her with me!" interrupted the doctor

impatiently. "My house and office require the services of Miss Lynden!" He turned and paced the room rapidly, hands clasped behind his bent back; then, halting:

"Do you want to go?" he repeated.

The girl coloured. "You are very kind to wish me to remain. . . . But I feel as though Mrs. Paige should not go alone."

"Oh, all right," said the doctor gruffly. "And you'd better start at once; that train leaves at mid-day." And, turning to his class: "Now, ladies, if you will kindly put away those rags and give me your strict and undivided attention!"--his voice rumbled off into a growl.

Ailsa was already putting on her hat. Presently Letty Lynden came out of the inner office, carrying a light scarf over her arm. She and Ailsa bade a hasty and excited good-bye to the ladies of the class; thanked Dr. Benton; listened solemnly to instructions; promised to obey; and gave him tremulous hands in leave taking.

"If those ungrateful dogs of soldiers don't appreciate you two young ladies, come home on the next train, where you'll be appreciated," grumbled the doctor. "Anyway, God bless you both. And don't drink dirty water! And keep your patients clean! Keep

'em clean! clean! clean! I've a notion that cleanness is nine-tenths of surgery; and it's all there is to nursing--but few agree with me. Good-bye! Tell Agnew I say that you know your business!"

Ailsa turned to Letty Lynden.

"It is so sweet of you to want to come. Will you send your trunk to my house? I will have luncheon ready, and another gray uniform for you. You'll be a communicant soon, so there is no possible harm in wearing it."

"I would like to wear Sainte Ursula's garb," said the girl wistfully. "Do you really think I may, Mrs. Paige?"

"You shall indeed! Will you be ready by eleven?"

"I have very little to take with me--only a small trunk. I will be at your house at eleven."

Ailsa, nervous and excited, nodded; the suddenness of departure was beginning to stimulate her. She walked rapidly home, summoned the servants, interviewed the house-keeper, sat down and drew necessary checks to cover a month's absence; sent hurried notes to Celia, to Camilla, to Colonel Arran, to Captain Hallam; dispatched a servant

to find a hack, another to pack for her, another to serve her something to eat.

The household below stairs was inclined to tears; old Jonas sniffled and shuffled about, shrunken hands hanging helpless, mild eyes following his young mistress as she moved decisively from room to room, gathering up or indicating to servants what she required for her journey.

Shawls, handbags, umbrellas, cloaks, and trunk were packed and strapped and carried off below. Letty arrived with her trunk, was taken to Ailsa's room where luncheon for two was ready on a big silver tray.

Later Jonas arrived, still sniffing, to announce the hack; and the two gray-garbed women hurried away amid the hysterical snivel of servants and the friendly mewing of Missy, who trotted after them to the front door, tail erect, followed by her latest progeny on diminutive and wavering legs.

All the way to the ferry Ailsa sat silent in her corner of the hack, worried, reflecting, trying to recollect what it was that she had left undone.

Something important she certainly had forgotten; she knew it,

searching her mind, while Letty furtively watched her in silence,
gloved hands clasped in her lap.

And suddenly Ailsa knew, and a flood of colour dyed her face; for
the vague sense of leaving something undone was the instinct to let
Berkley know she was going--the blind, unreasoning need for some
communication with him.

Had it been possible that all this time she had not utterly
uprooted this man from her insulted heart! Had hope, all this
time, unconsciously lived latent in her; was it possible that
somehow, somewhere, there remained a chance for him yet--a chance
for her--a cure--the only cure for all he had done to her--himself!

She reddened painfully again as memory, insolent, imperious,
flashed in her brain, illuminating the unquiet past, sparing her
nothing--no, not one breathless heart beat, not one atom of the
shame and the sweetness of it, not one dishonourable thrill she had
endured for love of him, not one soundless cry at night where she
lay tortured, dumb, hands clenched but arms wide flung as her heart
beat out his name, calling, calling to the man who had ended
himself for ever.

And Letty, silent in her comer, watched her without a word.

At the station, scarcely knowing what she did, Ailsa stopped at the telegraph office and wrote a despatch to him, addressing it to his old lodgings:

"I don't know whether this will ever reach you, but I can't go without trying to let you know that I am leaving for Washington as volunteer nurse. They have my address at the house.

"AILSA PAIGE."

Then the two gray-garbed women hurried to the train, but found no seats together until a lank, sad-eyed lieutenant of artillery gave up his place and doubled in with a sweating, red-necked contractor from St. Louis, who sat in his shirt sleeves, fanning himself with his straw hat.

The day was hot; the car dusty, ill-smelling, uncomfortable.

At Philadelphia their train was stalled for hours. Two long trains, loaded with ammunition and a section of field-artillery, had right of way; and then another train filled with jeering, blue-clad infantry blocked them.

The soldiers, bare headed and in their undershirts, lolled and yelled and hung from the car windows, chewing tobacco, smoking, or

gazing, jaws a-gape, at the crowds in the station.

Another train rolled by, trailing a suffocating stench of cattle and hogs from its slatted stock-cars; and Ailsa was almost stifled before her train at last moved heavily southward, saluted by good-natured witticisms from the soldiers at the windows of the stalled troop train.

Evening came, finding them somewhere in Delaware; the yellow stars appeared, the air freshened a little. Letty had fallen asleep; her dark lashes rested quietly on her cheeks, but the car jolted her head cruelly, and Ailsa gently drew it to her own shoulder and put one arm around her.

A major of heavy artillery turned toward her from his seat and said:

"Are you a volunteer nurse, ma'am?"

"Yes," motioned Ailsa with her lips, glancing cautiously at Letty.

"Can I do anything for you at Wilmington?"

She thanked him, smiling. He was disposed to be very friendly.

"You ladies are the right stuff," he said. "I've seen you aboard those abominable transports, behaving like angels to the poor sea-sick devils. I saw you after Big Bethel, scraping the blood and filth off of the wounded zouaves; I saw you in Washington after Bull Run, doing acts of mercy that, by God, madam! would have turned my stomach. . . . _Won't_ you let me do something for you. You don't need any whisky for your sick boys, do you?"

Ailsa smiled and shook her head, saying they had not yet been assigned to duty.

"I haven't anything else to offer you except tobacco," said the Major ruefully, and subsided.

At Wilmington, however, he got out, and presently reappeared with hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches, a big bottle of cold, sweet milk, and a basket of fruit. Letty awoke; realised that Ailsa had been holding her in her arms; looked at her in confusion, then impulsively bent and laid her lips against Ailsa's hands.

"Why--child--I didn't mind," faltered Ailsa, flushing in response to Letty's swift emotion. "See what this very kind officer has brought us for dinner, dear! Isn't it delicious?"

They were as hungry as two school children and ate everything; and

by and by the Major of heavy artillery came back and reversed the seat he had been occupying, and arranged it so he could sit facing them. He was fat, red-faced, with a pair of terrific moustaches, and a closely clipped head showing two scars.

"I've daughters older than you, ma'am," he said, in part explanation of his friendliness. "One's got a new baby. He's a devil!"

"W-what?" asked Ailsa.

"The right kind of devil, ma'am. I've been to see him! He wanted my sword; he tried to chew off my shoulder straps; he almost impaled himself on my spurs. By heaven, ma'am, _that's_ a boy for you!"

Ailsa smiled. She knew about babies; implanted in her had always been a perfect madness to possess one.

She and the red-faced Major talked babies. Letty, knowing nothing about babies and not deeply interested, lay back in her seat, watching Ailsa in the dim light of the ceiling lamps. She seemed never to have enough of Ailsa. It had been so from the first.

In Baltimore dawn was breaking when Ailsa awoke at the summons of

the major; and he remained devoted to the two nurses of Sainte Ursula, attending to their baggage and transfer across the city, finding seats in the waiting-room already invaded by the officers of several regiments in transit, and finally saw them safely aboard the cars again.

"Good-bye, little ladies," he said cheerily. "If I'm hit, God send one of you to wash my face for me. My card, ladies--if I may be permitted the honour. I'm to be at Fortress Monroe as soon as my command leaves Baltimore."

After he had gone away, Ailsa looked at his card:

A. J. DENISLOW

MAJOR, ART., U. S. A.

"I thought he was a regular," she said, smiling at Letty. "He's a perfect old dear. Shall we open the parcel and see what he has left us for breakfast?"

There was more milk, more peaches and pears, more bread and butter, and a cold roast chicken; and they made very merry over it, doing the best they could without knife and fork.

They were nearing Washington now. Every little while they passed

bodies of troops marching or encamped along the roads; and once they saw a line of army waggons, drab coloured, with yellow canvas tops, moving slowly in clouds of dust.

In the limpid morning light buzzards were already soaring over the green fields; the fresh odour of wild flowers came blowing in at the open car window; butterflies fluttered, wind-driven, helpless.

And now they were passing mounds of freshly turned red earth--long stretches of hillocks banked high and squared at the ends.

Hundreds of negroes were at work sodding them; here and there a flag fluttered and a bayonet gleamed.

"I believe all these little hills and ditches have something to do with forts," said Ailsa. "Certainly that great mound must be part of a fort. Do you see the cannon?"

Letty nodded, wide-eyed. And now they were passing soldiers on every road, at every bridge, along every creek bank.

Squads of them, muskets shining, marched briskly along beside the railroad track; sentinels stood at every culvert, every flag house, every water tank and local station past which they rolled without stopping. Acres of white tents flashed into view; houses and negro cabins became thicker; brick houses, too, appeared at intervals,

then half-finished blocks fronting the dusty roads, then rows and lines of dwellings, and street after street swarming with negroes and whites. And before they realised it they had arrived.

They descended from the car amid a pandemonium of porters, hackmen, soldiers, newsboys, distracted fellow-passengers, locomotives noisily blowing off steam, baggagemen trundling and slamming trunks about; and stood irresolute and confused.

"Could you direct us to the offices of the Sanitary Commission?"

asked Ailsa of a passing soldier wearing the insignia of the hospital service on his sleeve.

"You bet I can, ladies! Are you nurses?"

"Yes," said Ailsa, smiling.

"Bully for you," said the boy; "step right this way, Sanitary. One moment----"

He planted himself before a bawling negro hack driver and began to apply injurious observations to him, followed by terrible threats if he didn't take these "Sanitary Ladies" to the headquarters of the Commission.

"I'm going up that way, too," he ended, "and I'm going to sit on the box with you, and I'll punch your nose off if you charge my Sanitary Ladies more than fifty cents!"

And escorted in this amazing manner, cinder-smeared, hot, rumped, and very tired, Ailsa Paige and Letty Lynden entered the unspeakably dirty streets of the Capital of their country and turned into the magnificent squalor of Pennsylvania Avenue which lay, flanked by ignoble architecture, straight and wide and hazy under its drifting golden dust from the great unfinished dome of the Capitol to the Corinthian colonnade of the Treasury. Their negro drove slowly; their self-constituted escort, legs crossed, cap over one impish eye, lolled on the box, enjoying the drive.

Past them sped a company of cavalry in blue and yellow, bouncing considerably in their saddles, red faces very dusty under their tightly strapped caps, sabres and canteens jangling like an unexpected avalanche of tin-ware in a demoralised pantry.

"Go it, young 'uns!" cried their soldier escort from the box, waving his hand patronisingly. He also saluted an officer in spectacles as "Bully boy with a glass eye," and later informed another officer in a broad yellow sash that he was "the cheese." All of which painfully mortified the two young nurses of Sainte Ursula, especially when passing the fashionably-dressed throng

gathered in front of the Willard and promenading Lafayette Square.

"Oh, dear," said Ailsa, "I suppose he's only a boy, but I didn't know soldiers were permitted to be so impudent. What on earth do all these people think of us?"

Letty, who had been mischievously amused and inclined to enjoy it, looked very grave as the boy, after a particularly outrageous jibe at a highly respectable old gentleman, turned and deliberately winked at his "Sanitary Ladies."

"That's old hoss Cameron," he said. "I made such a mug at the old terrapin that he'll never be able to recognise my face."

"The--the Secretary of War!" gasped Ailsa.

"You very wicked little boy, don't you dare to make another face at anybody!--or I'll--I'll report your conduct to--to the Sanitary Commission!"

"Oh, come!" he said blankly, "don't do that, lady! They'll raise hell with me, if you do. I want to get hunky with the Sanitary boss."

"Then behave yourself!" said Ailsa, furious; "and don't you dare to swear again. Do you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am--I will--I won't, I mean. And if I see that old mudsill, Simon Cameron, I'll take off my cap to him, b'gosh!"

It was an anxious and subdued soldier who showed them the door of the Commission's office, and stood at attention, saluting carefully as the ladies passed him.

"You won't peach, will you?" he whispered loudly, as Ailsa stopped to pay the driver.

"No, I won't--this time," she said, smiling, "if you promise to be a very good soldier hereafter."

He promised fervidly. He happened to be on duty at headquarters, and the fear of the Commission had been driven into him deep. So she and Letty entered the door with a stream of people who evidently had business with the officials of the American Sanitary Commission; and a very amiable young man received them in their turn, took their papers, examined their credentials, nodded smilingly, and directed them to a small boarding-house on F Street, where, he explained, they had better remain until further orders.

There had been some desultory fighting in Virginia, he said, also there were a great many sick soldiers in the army.

Perhaps, added the young man, they would be sent to one of the city hospitals, but the chances were that they would be ordered directly to a field hospital. In that case their transportation would be by army waggon or ambulance, or the Commission might send one of its own mule-drawn conveyances. At any rate, they had better rest and not worry, because as long as the Commission had sent for them, the Commission certainly needed them, and would see that they arrived safely at their destination.

Which turned out to be a perfectly true prophecy; for after a refreshing bath in their boarding-house quarters, and a grateful change of linen, and an early supper, a big, bony cavalryman came clanking to their door, saying that a supply train was leaving for the South, and that an ambulance of the Sanitary Commission was waiting for them in front of the house.

The night was fearfully hot; scarcely a breath of air stirred as their ambulance creaked put toward the river.

The Long Bridge, flanked by its gate houses, loomed up in the dusk; and:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends with the countersign."

"Dismount one and advance with the countersign!"

And the Sergeant of cavalry dismounted and moved forward; there was a low murmur; then: "Pass on, Sanitary!"

A few large and very yellow stars looked down from the blackness above; under the wheels the rotten planking and worn girders of the Long Bridge groaned and complained and sagged.

Ailsa, looking out from under the skeleton hood, behind her, saw other waggons following, loaded heavily with hospital supplies and baggage, escorted by the cavalrymen, who rode as though exhausted, yellow trimmed shell jackets unbuttoned exposing sweat-soaked undershirts, caps pushed back on their perspiring heads.

Letty, lying on a mattress, had fallen asleep. Ailsa, scarcely able to breathe in the heavy heat, leaned panting against the framework, watching the darkness.

It seemed to be a little cooler on the Virginia side after they had

passed the General Hospital, and had gone forward through the deserted city of Alexandria. About a mile beyond a slight freshness, scarcely a breeze, stirred Ailsa's hair. The driver said to her, pointing at a shadowy bulk with his whip-stock:

"That's the Marshall House, where Colonel Ellsworth was killed. God help their 'Tigers' if the Fire Zouaves ever git at 'em."

She looked at the unlighted building in silence. Farther on the white tents of a Pennsylvania regiment loomed gray under the stars; beyond them the sentinels were zouaves of an Indiana regiment, wearing scarlet fezzes.

Along the road, which for a while paralleled the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, cavalry vedettes sat their horses, carbine on thigh. No trains passed the embankment; once she saw, on a weed-grown siding, half a dozen locomotives apparently intact; but no fire burned in their furnaces, no smoke curled from their huge drumhead stacks; and on the bell frame of one an owl was sitting.

And now, between a double line of ditches, where a battalion of engineers lay asleep in their blankets, the road entered the pine woods.

Ailsa slept fitfully, but the far challenge and the halting of the

waggon usually awoke her in darkness feebly lit by the rays of a candle-set lantern, swung up inquiringly by the corporal of some guard. And, "Pass forward, Sanitary!" was the invariable formula; and the ambulance rolled on again between a double abattis of fallen trees, flanked on either horizon by tall, quiet pines.

Once she heard singing; a small company of cavalry-men straggled by, and, seeing their long lances and their Belgian forage caps, she leaned out and asked what regiment it might be. Somebody answered: "Escort Squad of Rankin's Lancers, 1st United States. Our regiment is in Detroit, Miss, and thank God we're going back there."

And they rode on toward Washington, singing their monotonous "Do They Miss Me at Home" song, till she lost them against the darkness of the distant woods, and dropped back to her bed of shawls and blankets once more.

After midnight she slept, and it was only the noise the driver made pulling the canvas cover of the frame above her that awakened her, and she sat up, half frozen, in a fine fog that became a drizzle soon after the cover was up.

"The sunny South," observed the driver in disgust. "Yesterday the thermometer stood at 105 in Washington, and now look at this here weather, lady."

Day broke, bitter cold; it was raining heavily; but soon after sunrise the rain slackened, the fog grew thinner, and the air warmer. Slowly the sun appeared, at first only a dazzling blot through the smother, then brassy, glittering, flooding the chilled earth with radiance.

Through steaming fields, over thickets, above woods, the vapours were rising, disclosing a shining and wet world, sweet and fresh in its early autumn beauty.

The road to Fairfax Court House was deep in red mud, set with runnels and pools of gold reflecting corners of blue sky. Through it slopped mules and horses and wheels, sending splashes of spray and red mud over the roadside bushes. A few birds sang; overhead sailed and circled hundreds of buzzards, the sun gilding their upcurled wing tips as they sheered the tree-tops.

And now, everywhere over the landscape soldiers were visible, squads clothed only in trousers and shirts, marching among the oaks and magnolias with pick and shovel; squads carrying saws and axes and chains. A little farther on a wet, laurel-bordered road into the woods was being corduroyed; here they were bridging the lazy and discoloured waters of a creek, there erecting log huts. Hammer strokes rang from half-cleared hillsides, where some regiment, newly encamped, was busily flooring its tents; the blows of axes

sounded from the oak woods; and Ailsa could see great trees bending, slowly slanting, then falling with a rippling crash of smashed branches.

The noises in the forest awoke Letty. Whimpering sleepily, but warm under the shawls which Ailsa had piled around her, she sat up rubbing her dark eyes; then, with a little quick-drawn breath of content, took Ailsa's hand.

The driver said: "It's them gallus lumbermen from some o' the Maine regiments clearing the ground. They're some with the axe. Yonder's the new fort the Forty Thieves is building."

"The--what?" asked Ailsa, perplexed.

"Fortieth New York Infantry, ma'am. The army calls 'em the Forty Thieves, they're that bright at foraging, flag or no flag! Chickens, pigs, sheep--God knows they're a light-fingered lot; but their colonel is one of the best officers in the land. Why shouldn't they be a good fat regiment, with their haversacks full o' the best, when half the army feeds on tack and sow-belly, and the other half can't git that!"

The driver, evidently nearing his destination, became confidentially loquacious.

"Yonder's Fort Elsworth, ladies! It's hid by the forest, but it's there, you bet! If you ladies could climb up one o' them big pines, you'd see the line of forts and trenches in a half-moon from the Chain Bridge at Georgetown to Alexandria, and you'd see the seminary in its pretty park, and, belike, General McClellan in the chapel cupola, a-spying through his spy-glass what deviltry them rebel batteries is hatching on the hill over yonder."

"Are the rebels there?"

"Yes'm. Little Mac, he lets 'em stay there till he's good 'n' ready to gobble 'em."

Ailsa and Letty stared at the bluish hill, the top of which just showed above the forest.

A young soldier of engineers, carrying a bundle of axes, came along the road, singing in a delightful tenor voice the hymn, "Arise, My Soul, Arise!" He glanced admiringly at Ailsa, then at Letty, as the ambulance drove by, but his song did not falter; and far away they heard him singing gloriously through the autumn woods.

Presently a brigade medical officer rode up, signalling the driver to stop, with his gloved hand.

"Where do you come from, ladies--the General Hospital at Alexandria?"

Ailsa explained.

"That's good," he said emphatically; "the brigade hospitals are short handed. We need experienced nurses badly." And he pointed across the fields toward a hillside where a group of farm-houses and barns stood. A red flag napped darkly against the sky from the cupola of a barn.

"Is that the hospital?" asked Ailsa, noticing some ambulances parked near by.

"Yes, madam. You will report to Dr. West." He looked at them for a second, shook his head thoughtfully, then saluted and wheeled his horse.

"Pass on, Sanitary!" he added to the driver.

There was a deeply rutted farm road across the fields, guarded by gates which now hung wide open. Through these the supply waggons and the Commission ambulance rolled, followed slowly by the

rain-soaked troopers of the escort.

In front of one of the outhouses a tall, bald-headed, jolly-faced civilian stood in his checked shirt sleeves, washing bloody hands in a tin basin. To Ailsa's question he answered:

"I'm Dr. Hammond of the Sanitary Commission. Dr. West is in the wards. Very glad you came, Mrs. Paige; very glad, indeed, Miss Lynden. Here's an orderly who'll show you your quarters--can't give you more than one room and one bed. You'll get breakfast in that house over there, as soon as it's ready. After that come back here to me. There's plenty to do," he added grimly; "we're just sending fifty patients to Alexandria, and twenty-five to Washington. Oh, yes, there's plenty to do--plenty to do in this God-forsaken land. And, it isn't battles that are keeping us busy."

No, it was not battles that kept the doctors, nurses, and details for the ambulance corps busy at the front that first autumn and winter in Virginia. Few patients required the surgeon, few wounded were received, victims of skirmish or sharpshooting or of their own comrades' carelessness. But unwounded patients were arriving faster and faster from the corduroy road squads, from the outposts in the marshy forests, from the pickets' hovels on the red-mud banks of the river, from chilly rifle pits and windy hill camps, from the trenches along Richmond Turnpike, from the stockades at Fairfax. And there seemed no end of them. Hundreds of regimental

hospital tents, big affairs, sixty feet long by forty wide, were always full. The hospitals at Alexandria, Kalorama, the Columbia, and the Stone Mansion, took the overflow, or directed it to Washington, Philadelphia, and the North.

In one regiment alone, the Saratoga Regiment, the majority of the men were unfit for duty. In one company only twelve men could be mustered for evening parade. Typhoid, pneumonia, diphtheria, spotted fever were doing their work in the raw, unacclimated regiments. Regimental medical officers were exhausted.

Two steady streams of human beings, flowing in opposite directions, had set in with the autumn; the sick, going North, the new regiments arriving from the North to this vast rendezvous, where a great organizer of men was welding together militia and volunteers, hammering out of the raw mass something, that was slowly beginning to resemble an army.

Through the wards of their hospital Ailsa and Letty saw the unbroken column of the sick pass northward or deathward; from their shuttered window they beheld endless columns arriving--cavalry, infantry, artillery, engineers, all seeking their allotted fields or hillsides, which presently blossomed white with tents and grew blue and hazy with the smoke of camp fires.

All day long, rain or sun, the landscape swarmed with men and

horses; all day long bugle answered bugle from hill to hill; drums rattled at dawn and evening; the music from regimental and brigade bands was almost constant, saluting the nag at sunset, or, with muffled drums, sounding for the dead, or crashing out smartly at guard-mount, or, on dress parade, playing the favorite, "Evening Bells."

Leaning on her window ledge when off duty, deadly tired, Ailsa would listen dully to the near or distant strains, wondering at the strangeness of her life; wondering what it all was coming to.

But if life was strange, it was also becoming very real and very full as autumn quickened into winter, and the fever waxed fiercer in every regiment.

Life gave her now scant time for brooding--scarce time for thought at all. There were no other women at the Farm Hospital except the laundresses. Every regiment in the newly formed division encamped in the vicinity furnished one man from each company for hospital work; and from this contingent came their only relief.

But work was what Ailsa needed, and what Letty needed, too. It left them no chance to think of themselves, no leisure for self-pity, no inclination for it in the dreadful daily presence of pestilence and death.

So many, many died; young men, mostly. So many were sent away, hopelessly broken, and very, very young. And there was so much to do--so much!--instruments and sponges and lint to hold for surgeons; bandages, iced compresses, medicines to hand to physicians; and there were ghastly faces to be washed, and filthy bodies to be cleansed, and limp hands to be held, and pillows to be turned, and heads to be lifted. And there were letters to be written for sick boys and dying boys and dead boys; there was tea and lemonade and whisky and wine to be measured out and given; there was broth to be ordered and tasted and watched, delicacies to be prepared; clothing to be boiled; inventories to be made of dwindling medical supplies and of fresh stores to be ordered or unpacked from the pyramids of muddy boxes and barrels in the courts.

There was also the daily need of food and a breath of fresh air; and there were, sometimes, letters to read, None came to Ailsa from Berkley. No letters came to Letty at all, except from Dr. Benton, who wrote, without any preliminary explanation of why he wrote at all, once every fortnight with absolute regularity.

What he had to say in his letters Ailsa never knew, for Letty, who had been touched and surprised by the first one and had read it aloud to Ailsa, read no more of the letters which came to her from Dr. Benton. And Ailsa asked her nothing.

Part of Colonel Arran's regiment of lancers was now in Washington--or near it, encamped to the east of Meridian Hill, in a field beyond Seventh Street--at least these were the careful directions for posting letters given her by Captain Hallam, who wrote her cheerfully and incessantly; and in every letter he declared himself with a patient and cordial persistence that perhaps merited something more enthusiastic than Ailsa's shy and brief replies.

Colonel Arran had been to see her twice at her hospital that winter; he seemed grayer, bigger than ever in his tight blue and yellow cavalry uniform; and on both occasions he had spoken of Berkley, and had absently questioned her; and after both visits she had lain awake, her eyes wide in the darkness, the old pain stirring dully in her breast. But in the duties of the morning she forgot sorrow, forgot hope, and found strength and peace in a duty that led her ever amid the shadows of pain and death.

Once Hallam obtained leave, and made the journey to the Farm Hospital; but it had been a hard day for her, and she could scarcely keep awake to talk to him. He was very handsome, very bronzed, very eager and determined as a wooer; and she did not understand just how it happened, but suddenly the world's misery and her own loneliness overwhelmed her, and she broke down for the first time. And when Captain Hallam went lightly away about his business, and she lay on her mattress beside Letty, she could feel, furtively, a new jewel on the third finger of her left hand, and

fell asleep, wondering what she had done, and why--too tired to really care.

The sick continued to drift North; new regiments continued to arrive; the steady, tireless welding of the army was going on all around her, night and day; and the clamour of it filled the sky.

Celia Craig wrote her and sent her boxes for herself; but the contents of the parcels went to her sick men. Camilla wrote her and requested information concerning Stephen, who was, it appeared, very lax in correspondence; but Ailsa had not heard from Colonel Craig since the 3rd Zouaves left Fortress Monroe, and she had no information for either Celia or Camilla.

Christmas boxes for the hospital began to arrive early; presents came to Ailsa from Colonel Arran, from Hallam, from Celia and Camilla,

Letty had only one gift, a beautiful watch and chain from Dr. Benton; and Ailsa, going up to undress for a short sleep before supper, found the girl sitting with the little timepiece in her hand, crying silently all to herself.

"Why, dear!" she exclaimed, "what in the world is the trouble?" and put both arms around her. But Letty only laid her head against

Ailsa's breast, and sobbed anew, uncomforted.

"Won't you tell me what is wrong?" urged Ailsa, mystified.

"Yes . . . _I_ am . . . Don't pay attention to what I say, Mrs.

Paige. You--you like me, don't you?"

"I love you, dear,"

"Please--do. I am--very unhappy."

"You are only tired out. Listen; don't the wards look pretty with all the laurel and evergreens and ribbons! Our poor boys will have something to remind them of Christmas. . . . I--do you know that young Langleys is dead?"

"Yes--I helped him--die. Yesterday Dr. West seemed to think he would get well. But Hammond couldn't stop the gangrene, and he cut him almost to pieces. Oh--I'm very, very miserable--my boys die so fast--so fast----"

"You mustn't be miserable on Christmas Eve! I won't let you be silly!"

"I'm gay enough in the wards," said Letty listlessly; "I've got to be. Can't I cry a little in my own room?"

"No, we haven't time to cry," said Ailsa decisively. "Lie down beside me and go to sleep. Flannery has promised to wake us in time for supper."

"I can't get Langley's terrible face out of my mind," whimpered Letty, cuddling close to Ailsa, as they lay in bed in the wintry darkness. "It was all drawn up on one side."

"But coma had set in," said Ailsa gently. "You know, he wasn't suffering when he died. . . . You'll write to his mother, won't you, dear? Or shall I?"

"I will. . . . She wanted to come, you remember, but she's bedridden. . . . Her only son. . . . Yes, I'll write . . . I think Peterson is going to die, next----"

"But Levy is getting well," interrupted Ailsa.

"Stop it, Letty dear! I won't let you become morbid. Think of your beautiful watch! Think of dear Dr. Benton." "I--I am," gasped Letty, and fell to crying again until she sobbed herself to sleep

in Ailsa's tired arms.

Supper was spread in Dr. West's private office; Hallam had obtained leave, and Ailsa expected him; Colonel Arran was in Washington and could not come, but the company was to be a small one at best--Ailsa, Letty Lynden, Dr. West, Dr. Hammond, and Hallam were all who had been expected for Christmas Eve supper.

They waited for Hallam until Dr. West decided to wait no longer, saying that he was either stuck in the mud somewhere or had been detailed for duty unexpectedly.

So Ailsa lighted the Christmas candles, and the two young women in their fresh gray garbs, and the two civilian doctors in clean clothes, sat down before a rather thin roasted turkey. But the bird proved tender and juicy, and it was beautifully cooked; and a glass of wine sent the colour into Letty's pale cheeks, and straightened Ailsa's drooping neck.

Candles, laurel branches, evergreens, bits of red ribbon, and flags made the office very gay and attractive. Dr. West rose and delivered an unexpected speech, complimenting the ladies and praising their skill and devotion; then dinner began, and Dr. Hammond told about an intensely interesting operation, which made the negro waiter turn almost white.

"Christmas comes but once a year!" cried jolly Dr. Hammond, warming up. "Let's be merry!" And he told about another operation even more wonderful than the first; and Letty, catching a glimpse of the negro's wildly rolling eyes, threw back her head and laughed. It was the first genuine laughter of the evening, and rested everybody.

A few moments later there came a jingle of metal from outside, and Hallam walked in, his wonderfully handsome face aglow, and plenty of red mud frozen on his boots.

"I've a green orderly outside. Where can I stow him?" he asked, shaking hands and exchanging preliminary Christmas greetings all around.

"I'll attend to him," said Ailsa, flushed and a little shy as she felt the significant pressure of Hallam's hand and saw him glance at her ring.

"No," he insisted, "I'll see to him myself, if you'll tell me where he can put the horses and find some supper."

"Poor fellow," said Ailsa. "Tell him to stable the horses in the new barn, and go to the kitchen. Wait a moment, Captain Hallam, I'd rather do it myself!" And she turned lightly and ran out to

the dark porch.

The trooper holding Hallam's horse: sat his own saddle, wrapped to the eyes in his heavy overcoat, long lance with its drooping pennon slanting stiffly athwart the wintry wilderness of stars.

"Soldier!" she called gently from the porch. "Stable, blanket, and feed; then come back to the kitchen, and there will be a good hot dinner waiting."

The cavalryman slowly turned his head at the sound of her voice. And, as he made no movement to obey:

"There is the stable over there," she said, pointing across the frozen field. "Follow that gate path. There's a lantern in the barn."

An orderly, passing, added:

"Come on, lancer. I'm going to the barn myself;" and very slowly the trooper turned both tired horses and walked them away into the darkness.

When she returned to the table there was considerable laughter over

a story that Hallam had been telling. He jumped up, seated Ailsa, hovered over her for a second with just a suspicion of proprietary air which made her blush uncomfortably. Talking had become general, but everybody noted it, and Letty's eyes grew wide and velvety, and the blood was making her cheeks and lips very pink.

Dr. West said: "The new regiment on Pine Knob was recruited from the Bowery. I happened to be with Kemp, their surgeon, when sick call sounded, and I never saw such a line of impudent, ruffianly malingerers as filed before Kemp. One, I am convinced, had deliberately shot off his trigger finger; but it couldn't be proven, and he'll get his discharge. Another, a big, hulking brute, all jaw and no forehead, came up and looked insolently at Kemp.

"Kemp said: 'Well, what's the matter with you?' "'Aw,' said the soldier, with a leer, 'I've got de lopsy-palls, and I wanter go to de horspittle, I do.'

"I never saw such a mad man as Kemp was.

"So you've got the lopsy-palls, have you?"

"Bet yer boots, I have.'

"_And_ you want to go to the hospital?"

"Aw--w'ats der matter wit youse, Doc.?"

"And Kemp gave him a bang on the eye with his fist, and another on the nose, and then began to hit him so quickly that the fellow reeled, about, yelling for mercy.

"'Sure cure for the lopsy-palls,' said Kemp; and, turning his glare on the rest of the shivering line: 'Anybody else got 'em?' he asked briskly.

"At that a dozen big brutes sneaked out of the line and hurriedly decamped; and I don't think that disease is going to be popular in that regiment."

A shout of laughter greeted the story. All present had seen too many instances of malingering not to appreciate Surgeon Kemp's cure for a disease which never existed.

A plum pudding was brought on and set afire. Ailsa poured the burning sauce over and over it. Dr. Hammond got up and threw some more pine logs on the fire. Huge shadows rose up and danced in the ruddy light, as the candles burned lower. Then Dr. West began

another story, but was checked by the appearance of a hospital

steward:

"Davis, Ward A, No. 3, is very bad, sir."

"Going?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor bent above the table, took a hasty spoonful of pudding, nodded to the company, and went out.

"Speaking of malingerers," began Hammond, "I saw the Colonel of the forty Thieves put down in a most amusing manner the day before Bull Run. Shall I tell it? It involves some swearing."

Ailsa laughed. "Proceed, Dr. Hammond. Do you think Miss Lynden and I have been deaf since we arrived at the front?"

"Does anybody in this hospital use bad language?" demanded the doctor sharply.

"Not to us," said Ailsa, smiling. "But there's an army just outside the windows. Go on with your story, please."

"Well, then," said the jolly surgeon, "I was talking with Colonel Riley, when up walks the most honest-looking soldier I think I ever saw; and he gazed straight into the Colonel's eyes as he saluted. He wanted a furlough, it appeared, to go to New York and see his dying wife.

"Riley said: 'Is she very sick?'

"Yes, Colonel.'

"You have a letter: saying she is very sick?'

"Yes, Colonel.'

"Well, _I_ also have a letter from your wife. I wanted to make certain about all the applications for furlough you have been making, so I wrote her.'

"Yes, Colonel.'

"And she says that she is perfectly well, and does not want you to come home!'

"The soldier smiled.

"Did you write a letter to my wife, Colonel?"

"I did."

"Did my wife write to you?"

"She did. And what do you mean by coming here to me with a lie about your sick wife! Have you anything to say to that?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Then say it!"

"Well, Colonel, all I have to say is that there are two of the damnedest, biggest liars that ever lived, right here in this regiment!"

"What!"

"The soldier grinned.

"I'm not married at all,' he said, 'and I'm the biggest liar--and you can ask the boys who the damnest liar is."

When the merriment and laughter had subsided, Hallam told another story rather successfully; then Hammond told another. Then Dr. West returned; the tiny Christmas tree, cut in the forest, and loaded with beribboned cakes and sticks of chocolate and a few presents tied in tissue-paper, was merrily despoiled.

Ailsa and Letty had worked slippers for the two doctors, greatly appreciated by them, apparently; Hallam had some embroidered handkerchiefs from Ailsa, and she received a chain and locket from him--and refrained from opening the locket, although everybody already had surmised that their engagement was a fact.

Letty sent an orderly for her guitar, and sang very sweetly an old-fashioned song:

"When the moonlight
Shines bright
Silvery bright on the sea."

Ailsa sang "Aileen Aroon," and "Oft in the Stilly Night," and everybody, later, sang "The Poor Old Soldier."

The fire glowed red in the chimney; gigantic shadows wavered on wall and ceiling; and, through the Christmas candles dimly burning, the branches of the little evergreen spread, laden with cake and candy.

"They're to have a tree in every ward to-morrow," said Ailsa, turning toward Hallam. Her eyes smiled, but her voice was spiritless. A tinge of sadness had somehow settled over the festivity; Hammond was staring at the fire, chin in hand; West sipped his wine reflectively; Letty's idle fingers touched her guitar at intervals, as her dark eyes rested on Ailsa and Hallam.

Hallam had found in camp a copy of a Southern newspaper; and, thinking it might amuse the company to read it, produced it.

Ailsa, looking over his shoulder, noticed a poem called "Christmas," printed on the first page.

"Read it aloud," he said, laughing. "Let's hear what sort of Christmas poetry the Johnnies produce."

So, after smilingly scanning the first lines, she began, aloud; but her face had grown very grave, and her low voice thrilled them as she became conscious of the deeper sadness of the verse.

"How grace this Hallowed Day?

Shall happy bells from yonder ancient spire

Send their glad greetings to each Christmas fire

Round which our children play?

"How shall we grace the Day?

With feast and song and dance and homely sport,

And shout of happy children in the court,

And tales of ghost and fay?

"Is there indeed a door

Where the old pastimes with their joyful noise

And all the merry round of Christmas joys

Can enter as of yore?

"Would not some pallid face

Look in upon the banquet, calling up

Dread shapes of battle in the Christmas cup,

And trouble all the place?

"How can we hear the mirth

While some loved reveller of a year ago

Keeps his mute Christmas now beneath the snow,

In cold Virginia earth--"

Her voice suddenly broke; she laughed, slightly hysterical, the tears glittering in her eyes.

"I--c-can't--read it, somehow. . . . Forgive me, everybody, I think I'm--tired----"

"Nerves," said West cheerily. "It'll all come right in a moment, Mrs. Paige. Go up and sit by Davis for a while. He's going fast."

Curious advice, yet good for her. And Ailsa rose and fled; but a moment later, seated at the side of the dying man, all thought of self vanished in the silent tragedy taking place before her.

"Davis?" she whispered.

The man opened his sunken eyes as the sleepy steward rose, gave his bedside chair to Ailsa, and replaced the ominous screen.

"I am here, Private Davis," she said cheerily, winking away the last tear drop.

Then the man sighed deeply, rested his thin cheek against her hand, and lay very, very still.

At midnight he died as he lay. She scarcely realised it at first.

And when at length she did, she disengaged her chilled hand, closed his eyes, drew the covering over his face, and, stepping from behind the screen, motioned to the steward on duty.

Descending the stairs, her pale, pensive glance rested on the locket flashing on its chain over the scarlet heart sewn on her breast. Somehow, at thought of Hallam waiting for her below, she halted on the stairway, one finger twisted in the gold chain. And presently the thought of Hallam reminded her of the trooper and the hot dinner she had promised the poor fellow. Had the cook been kind to him?

She hastened downstairs, passed the closed door of the improvised dining-room, traversed the hall to the porch, and, lifting the skirts of her gray garb, sped across the frozen yards to the kitchen.

The cook had gone; fire smouldered in the range; and a single candle guttered in its tin cup on the table.

Beside it, seated on a stool, elbows planted on both knees, face buried in his spread fingers, sat the lancer, apparently asleep.

She cast a rapid glance at the table. The remains of the food satisfied her that he had had his hot dinner. Once more she glanced at him, and then started to withdraw on tiptoe.

And he raised his head; and she gazed into the face of Berkley.

Neither stirred, although in the shock of discovery she felt that she would drop where she stood. Then, instinctively, she reached for the table's edge, rested against it, hand clutching it, fascinated eyes never leaving his face.

He got up leisurely, walked toward her, made an abrupt turn and faced her again from the window recess, leaning back against the closed wooden shutters.

Her heart was beating too rapidly for her to speak; she tried to straighten her shoulders, lift her head. Both sank, and she looked down blindly through the throbbing silence.

Berkley spoke first; but she could not answer him. Then he said, again, lightly:

"A woman's contempt is a bitter thing; but they say we thrive best on bitter medicine. Do you wish me to go, Ailsa? If so, where? I'll obey with alacrity."

She raised her dazed eyes.

"W-was that _you_, with Captain Hallam's horse--there in the starlight--when I spoke?"

"Yes. Didn't you know me?"

"No. Did you know _me_?"

"Of course. I nearly fell out of my saddle."

She strove hard to collect herself.

"How did you know it was I?"

"How?" He laughed a short, mirthless laugh. "I knew your voice.

Why shouldn't I know it?"

"Did--had anybody told you I was here?"

"No. Who is there to tell me anything?"

"Nobody wrote you?--or telegraphed?"

He laughed again. "Nobody has my address."

"And you never--received--receive--letters?"

"Who would write to me? No, I never receive letters. Why do you ask?"

She was silent.

He waited a moment, then said coolly: "If you actually have any interest in what I'm doing--" and broke off with a shrug. At which she raised her eyes, waiting for him to go on.

"I went into an unattached company--The Westchester Horse--and some fool promised us incorporation with the 1st Cavalry and quick service. But the 1st filled up without us and went off. And a week ago we were sent off from White Plains Camp as K Company to"--he bit his lip and stared at her--"to--your friend Colonel Arran's regiment of lancers. We took the oath. Our captain, Hallam, selected me for his escort to-night. That is the simple solution of my being here. I didn't sneak down here to annoy you. I didn't know you were here."

After a moment she raised her pallid face.

"Have you seen Colonel Arran?"

"No," he said shortly.

"I--it would give me--pleasure--to recommend you to his--attention.

May I write----"

"Thank you, no."

There was another painful interval of silence. Then:

"May I speak to Captain Hallam about you?"

"No, thank you!" he said contemptuously, "I am currying no favours."

Hurt, she shrank away, and the blood mounted to her temples.

"You see," he said, "I'm just a plain brute, and there's no use being kind to me." He added in a lower voice, but deliberately:

"You once found out that."

She quivered and straightened up.

"Yes," she said, "I found that out. I have paid very dearly for my--my--" But she could not continue.

Watching her, cap hanging in his gauntleted hand, he saw the colour deepen and deepen in neck and cheek, saw her eyes falter, and turn from him.

"Is there any forgiveness for me?" he said. "I didn't ask it before--because I've still some sense of the ludicrous left in me--or did have. It's probably gone now, since I've asked if it is in you to pardon--" He shrugged again, deeming it useless; and she made no sign of comprehension.

For a while he stood, looking down at his cap, turning it over and over, thoughtfully.

"Well, then, Ailsa, you are very kind to offer what you did offer. But--I don't like Colonel Arran," he added with a sneer, "and I haven't any overwhelming admiration for Captain Hallam. And there you are, with your kindness and gentleness and--everything--utterly wasted on a dull, sordid brute who had already insulted you once. . . . Shall I leave your kitchen?"

"No," she said faintly. "I am going."

He offered to open the door for her, but she opened it herself,
stood motionless, turned, considered him, head high and eyes steady;

"You have killed in me, this night--this Christmas night--something
that can never again I-live in me. Remember that in the years to
come."

"I'm sorry," he said. "That's the second murder I've attempted.
The other was your soul."

Her eyes flashed.

"Even murderers show some remorse--some regret----"

"I do regret," he said deliberately, "that I didn't kill it. . . .
You would have loved me then."

She turned white as death, then, walking slowly up in front of him:

"You lie!" she said in even tones.

Confronted, never stirring, their eyes met; and in the cold, concentrated fury which possessed her she set her small teeth and stared at him, rigid, menacing, terrible in her outraged pride.

After a while he stirred; a quiver twitched his set features.

"Nevertheless--" he said, partly to himself. Then, drawing a long breath, he turned, unhooked his sabre from a nail where it hung, buckled his belt, picked up the lance which stood slanting across a chair, shook out the scarlet, swallow-tailed pennon, and walked slowly toward the door--and met Letty coming in.

"Mrs. Paige," she said, "we couldn't imagine what had become of you--" and glancing inquiringly at Berkley, started, and uttered a curious little cry:

"You!"

"Yes," he said, smiling through his own astonishment.

"Oh!" she cried with a happy catch in her voice, and held out both hands to him; and he laid aside his lance and took them, laughing down into the velvet eyes. And he saw the gray garb of Sainte

Ursula that she wore, saw the scarlet heart on her breast, and laughed again--a kindly, generous, warm-hearted laugh; but there was a little harmless malice glimmering in his eyes.

"Wonderful--wonderful, Miss Lynden"--he had never before called her Miss Lynden--"I am humbly overcome in the presence of Holy Sainte Ursula embodied in you. How on earth did old Benton ever permit you to escape? He wrote me most enthusiastically about you before I--ahem--left town."

"Why didn't you let me know where you were going?" asked Letty with a reproachful simplicity that concentrated Ailsa's amazed attention on her, for she had been looking scornfully at Berkley.

"Why--you are very kind, Miss Lynden, but I, myself, didn't know where I was going."

"I--I wanted to write you," began Letty; and suddenly remembered Ailsa's presence and turned, shyly:

"Mrs. Paige," she said, "this private soldier is Mr. Berkley--a gentleman. May I be permitted to present him to you?"

And there, while the tragic and comic masks grinned side by side, and the sky and earth seemed unsteadily grinning above and under

her feet, Ailsa Paige suffered the mockery of the presentation;
felt the terrible irony of it piercing her; felt body and senses
swaying there in the candle-light; heard Letty's happy voice and
Berkley's undisturbed replies; found courage to speak, to take her
leave; made her way back through a dreadful thickening darkness to
her room, to her bed, and lay there silent, because she could not
weep.

CHAPTER XII

In February the birds sang between flurries of snow; but the end of
the month was warm and lovely, and robins, bluebirds, and cardinals
burst into a torrent of song. The maples' dainty fire illumined
every swamp; the green thorn turned greener; and the live-oaks
sprouted new leaves amid their olive-tinted winter foliage, ever
green.

Magnolia and laurel grew richer and glossier; azaleas were budding;
dog-wood twigs swelled; and somewhere, in some sheltered hollow, a
spray of jasmine must have been in bloom, because the faint and
exquisite scent haunted all the woodlands.

On the 17th the entire army was paraded by regiments to cheer for
the fall of Fort Donnelson.

About mid-February the Allotment Commission began its splendid work in camp; and it seemed to Ailsa that the mental relief it brought to her patients was better than any other medicine--that is, better for the Union patients; for now there were, also, in the wards, a number of Confederate wounded, taken at various times during the skirmishing around Fairfax--quiet, silent, dignified Virginians, and a few fiery Louisianians, who at first, not knowing what to expect, scarcely responded to the brusque kindness of the hospital attendants.

The first Confederate prisoner that Ailsa ever saw was brought in on a stretcher, a quiet, elderly man in bloody gray uniform, wearing the stripes of a sergeant.

Prisoners came more often after that. Ailsa, in her letters to Celia Craig, had mentioned the presence of Confederate wounded at the Farm Hospital; and, to her delight and amazement, one day late in February a Commission ambulance drove up, and out stepped Celia Craig; and the next instant they were locked tightly in each other's arms,

"Darling--darling!" sobbed Ailsa, clinging desperately to Celia, "it is heavenly of you to come. I was so lonely, so tired and discouraged. You won't go away soon, will you? I couldn't bear it--I want you so--I need you----"

"Hush, Honey-bud! I reckon I'll stay a while. I've been a week with Curt's regiment at Fortress Monroe. I had my husband to myse'f fo' days, befo' they sent him to Acquia Creek. And I've had my boy a whole week all to myse'f! Then his regiment went away. They wouldn't tell me where.' But God is kinder. . . . You are certainly ve'y pale, Honey-bee!"

"I'm well, dearest--really I am, I'll stay well now. Is Curt all right? And Stephen? And Paige and Marye?--and Camilla?"

"Everybody is well, dear. Curt is ve'y brown and thin--the dear fellow! And Steve is right handsome. I'm just afraid some pretty minx--" She laughed and added: "But I won't care if she's a rebel minx."

"Celia! . . . And I--I didn't think you liked that word."

"What word, Honey-bell?" very demurely.

"Rebel!"

"Why, I reckon George Washington wore that title without reproach. It's a ve'y good title--rebel," she added serenely. "I admire it enough to wear it myse'f."

Quarters were found for Mrs. Craig. Letty shyly offered to move, but Celia wouldn't have it.

"My dear child," she said, "I'm just a useless encumbrance 'round the house; give me a corner where I may sit and look on and--he'p everybody by not inte'fering."

Her corner was an adjoining section of the garret, boarded up, wall-papered, and furnished for those who visited the Farm Hospital on tour of inspection or to see some sick friend or relative, or escort some haggard convalescent to the Northern home.

Celia had brought a whole trunkful of fresh gingham clothes and aprons, and Ailsa could not discover exactly why, until, on the day following her arrival, she found Celia sitting beside the cot of a wounded Louisiana Tiger, administering lemonade.

"Dearest," whispered Ailsa that night, "it is very sweet of you to care for your own people here. We make no distinction, however, between Union and Confederate sick; so, dear, you must be very careful not to express any--sentiments."

Celia laughed. "I won't express any sentiments, Honey-bee. I reckon I'd be drummed out of the Yankee army." Then, graver: "If

I'm bitter--I'll keep it to myself."

"I know, dear. . . . And--your sympathies would never lead you--permit you to any--indiscretion."

"You mean in talking--ahem!--treason--to sick Confederates? I don't have to, dear."

"And. . . you must never mention anything concerning what you see inside our lines. You understand that, of course, don't you, darling?"

"I hadn't thought about it," said Celia musingly.

Ailsa added vaguely: "There's always a government detective hanging around the hospital."

Celia nodded and gazed out of the open window. Very far away the purple top of a hill peeped above the forest. Ailsa had told her that a Confederate battery was there. And now she looked at it in silence, her blue eyes very soft, her lips resting upon one another in tender, troubled curves.

Somewhere on that hazy hill-top a new flag was flying; soldiers of

a new nation were guarding it, unseen by her. It was the first outpost of her own people that she had ever seen; and she looked at it wistfully, proudly, her soul in her eyes. All the pain, all the solicitude, all the anguish of a Southern woman, and a wife of a Northern man, who had borne him Northern children deepened in her gaze, till her eyes dimmed and her lids quivered and closed; and Ailsa's arms tightened around her.

"It is ve'y hard, Honey-bud," was all she said.

She had Dr. West's permission to read to the sick, mend their clothing, write letters for them, and perform such little offices as did not require the judgment of trained nurses.

By preference she devoted herself to the Confederate sick, but she was very sweet and gentle with all, ready to do anything any sick man asked; and she prayed in her heart that if her husband and her son were ever in need of such aid. God would send, in mercy, some woman to them, and not let them lie helpless in the clumsy hands of men.

She had only one really disagreeable experience. Early in March a government detective sent word that he wished to speak to her; and she went down to Dr. West's office, where a red-faced, burly man sat smoking a very black cigar. He did not rise as she entered; and, surprised, she halted at the doorway.

"Are you Mrs. Craig?" he demanded, keeping his seat, his hat, and the cigar between his teeth.

"Are you a government detective?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then stand up when you speak to me!" she said sharply. "I reckon a Yankee nigger has mo' manners than you display."

And the astonished detective presently found himself, hat in hand, cigar discarded, standing while Mrs. Craig, seated, replied indifferently to his very mild questions.

"Are you a Southerner, Mrs. Craig?"

"I am."

"Your husband is Colonel Estcourt Craig, 3rd New York Zouaves?"

"He is."

"You have a son serving in that regiment?"

"Yes."

"Private soldier?"

"Yes."

"You are not a volunteer nurse?"

"No."

"Your sister-in-law, Mrs. Paige, is?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mrs. Craig"--but he could not succeed in swaggering, with her calm, contemptuous eyes taking his measure--"now, Mrs. Craig, is it true that you own, a mansion called Paigecourt near Richmond?"

"I do."

"It was your father's house?"

"It was my father's home befo' he was married."

"Oh. Who owns your father's house--the one he lived in after he was married?"

"Mrs. Paige."

"She is your sister-in-law? Your brother inherited this house? And it is called Marye Mead, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It is not occupied?"

"No."

"Is Paigecourt--your own house--ah--occupied?"

"It is."

"By an overseer?"

"By a housekeeper. The overseer occupies his own quarters."

"I see. So you hold slaves."

"There are negroes on the plantations. Mr. Paige, my father, freed his slaves befo' I was married."

The man looked surprised and incredulous.

"How did your father come to do that? I never heard of a Southern slave owner voluntarily freeing his slaves."

"A number of gentlemen have done so, at va'ious times, and fo' va'ious reasons," said Celia quietly. "Mr. Paige's reason was a personal matter. . . . Am I obliged to give it to you?"

"I think you had better," said the detective, watching her.

"Ve'y well. Mr. Paige happened to find among family papers a letter written by General Washington to my grandfather, in which his Excellency said;

"I never mean to possess another slave, it being now among my first wishes to see slavery, in this country, abolished by law.'

That is why my father freed his slaves."

The detective blinked; then, reddening, started toward the door, until he suddenly remembered his rudiments of manners. So he halted, bowed jerkily, clapped the hat on his head and the cigar into his mouth, and hastily disappeared.

When Celia scornfully informed Ailsa what had happened, the latter looked worried.

"You see," she said, "how easily trouble is created. Somehow the Government has learned about your coming here."

"Oh, I had to have a pass."

"Of course. And somebody has informed somebody that you own Paigecourt, and that you hold slaves there, and therefore you might be a suspicious person. And they told that detective to find out all about you. You see, dear, for Curt's sake and Stephen's sake as well as for your own, you will have to be particularly careful. You see it, don't you?"

"Yes," said Celia, thoughtfully, "I----"

The sudden thunder of a field battery drowned her voice. Ailsa ran to the door and looked out, and a soldier shouted to her the news of the _Monitor's_ combat with the _Merrimac_. Battery after battery saluted; regiment after regiment blackened the hill-tops, cheering. At dusk gigantic bonfires flamed.

That evening Hallam came unexpectedly.

Now Ailsa had neither worn her ring and locket since her sister-in-law had arrived at the Farm Hospital, nor had she told her one word about Hallam.

Since her unhappy encounter with Berkley, outraged pride had aided to buoy her above the grief over the deep wound he had dealt her. She never doubted that his insolence and deliberate brutality had killed in her the last lingering spark of compassion for the memory of the man who had held her in his arms that night so long--so long ago.

Never, even, had she spoken to Letty about him, or betrayed any interest or curiosity concerning Letty's knowing him. . . . Not that, at moments, the desire to ask, to know had not burned her.

Never had she spoken of Berkley to Hallam. Not that she did not

care to know what this private in Colonel Arran's regiment of lancers might be about. And often and often the desire to know left her too restless to endure her bed; and many a night she rose and dressed and wandered about the place under the yellow stars.

But all fires burn themselves: to extinction; a dull endurance, which she believed had at last become a God-sent indifference, settled on her mind. Duties helped her to endure; pride, anger, helped her toward the final apathy which she so hopefully desired to attain. And still she had never yet told Celia about Hallam and his ring; never told her about Berkley and his visit to the Farm Hospital that Christmas Eve of bitter memory.

So when, unexpectedly, Hallam rode into the court, dismounted, and sent word that he was awaiting Ailsa in Dr. West's office, she looked up at Celia in guilty consternation.

They had been seated in Celia's room, mending by candle-light, and the steward who brought the message was awaiting Ailsa's response, and Celia's lifted eyes grew curious as she watched her sister-in-law's flushed face.

"Say to Captain Hallam that I will come down, Flannery."

And when the hospital steward had gone:

"Captain Hallam is a friend of Colonel Arran, Celia."

"Oh," said Celia drily, and resumed her mending.

"Would you care to meet him, dear?"

"I reckon not, Honey-bud."

A soldier had found a spray of white jasmine in the woods that afternoon and had brought it to Ailsa. She fastened a cluster in the dull gold masses of her hair, thickly drooping above each ear, glanced at her hot cheeks in the mirror, and, exasperated, went out and down the stairs.

And suddenly, there in the star-lit court, she saw Berkley leaning against one of the horses, and Letty Lynden standing beside him, her pretty face uplifted to his.

The shock of it made her falter. Dismayed, she shrank back, closing the door noiselessly. For a moment she stood leaning against it, breathing fast; then she turned and stole through to the back entrance, traversed the lower gallery, and came into Dr. West's office, offering Hallam a lifeless hand.

They talked of everything--every small detail concerning their personal participation in the stirring preparations which were going on all around them; gossip of camp, of ambulance; political rumours, rumours from home and abroad; and always, through her brain, ran the insistent desire to know what Berkley was doing in his regiment; how he stood; what was thought of him; whether the Colonel had yet noticed him. So many, many things which she had supposed no longer interested her now came back to torment her into inquiry. . . . And Hallam talked on, his handsome sun-bronzed face aglow, his eager eyes of a lover fastened on her and speaking to her a different but silent language in ardent accompaniment to his gaily garrulous tongue.

"I tell you, Ailsa, I witnessed a magnificent sight yesterday. Colonel Rush's regiment of lancers, a thousand strong, rode into the meadow around Meridian Hill, and began to manoeuvre at full speed, not far away from us. Such a regiment! Every man a horseman; a thousand lances with scarlet pennons fluttering in the sunlight! By ginger! it was superb! And those Philadelphians of the 6th Pennsylvania Lancers can give our 8th Lancers a thousand keener points than the ends of their lance blades!"

"I thought your regiment was a good one," she said surprised.

"It is--for greenhorns. Every time we ride out past some of these

dirty blue regiments from the West, they shout: 'Oh my! Fresh fish! Fresh fish!' until our boys are crazy to lay a lance butt across their ragged blouses."

"After all," said Ailsa, smiling, "what troops have really seen war yet--except the regiments at Bull Run--and those who have been fighting in the West?"

"Oh, we are fresh fish," laughed Hallam. "I don't deny it. But Lord! what an army we look like! It ought to scare the Johnnies into the Union again, just to look at us; but I don't suppose it will."

Ailsa scarcely heard him; she had caught the sound of regular and steady steps moving up and down the wooden walk outside; and she had caught glimpses, too, of a figure in the starlight, of two figures, Berkley and Letty, side by side, pacing the walk together.

To and fro, to and fro, they passed, until it seemed as though she could not endure it. Hallam laughed and talked, telling her about something or other--she did not know what--but all she listened to was the steady footsteps passing, repassing.

"Your orderly--" she scarce knew what she was saying--"is the same--the one you had Christmas Eve?"

"Yes," said Hallam. "How did you know?"

"I re--thought so."

"What wonderfully sharp eyes those violet ones of yours are, Ailsa!

Yes, I did take Ormond with me on Christmas Eve--the surly brute."

"Or--Ormond?"

"That's his rather high-flown name. Curious fellow. I like

him--or try to. I've an odd idea he doesn't like me, though.

Funny, isn't it, how a man goes out of his way to win over a nobody

whom he thinks doesn't like him but ought to? He's an odd crab,"

he added.

"Odd?" Her voice sounded so strange to her that she tried again.

"Why do you think him odd?"

"Well, he is. For one thing, he will have nothing to do with

others of his mess or troop or squadron, except a ruffianly trooper

named Burgess; consequently he isn't very popular. He could be.

Besides, he rides better than anybody except the drill-master at

White Plains; he rides like a gentleman---and looks like one, with

that infernally cool way of his. No, Ormond isn't very popular."

"Because he--looks like a gentleman?"

"Because he has the bad breeding of one. Nobody can find out anything about him."

"Isn't it bad breeding to try?"

Hallam laughed. "Technically. But a regiment that elects its officers is a democracy; and if a man is too good to answer questions he's let alone."

"Perhaps," said Ailsa, "that is what he wants."

"He has what he wants, then. Nobody except the trooper Burgess ventures to intrude on his sullen privacy. Even his own bunky has little use for him. . . . Not that Ormond isn't plucky. That's all that keeps the boys from hating him."

"_Is_ he plucky?"

Hallam said; "We were on picket duty for three days last week. The Colonel had become sick of their popping at us, and asked for

twelve carbines to the troop. On the way to the outposts the ammunition waggon was rushed by the Johnnies, and, as our escort had only their lances, they started to scatter--would have scattered, I understand, in spite of the sergeant if that man Ormond hadn't ridden bang into them, cursing and swearing and waving his pistol in his left hand.

"By God!" he said, 'it's the first chance you've had to use these damned lances! Are you going to run away?'

"And the sergeant and the trooper Burgess and this fellow Ormond got 'em into line and started 'em down the road at a gallop; and the rebs legged it."

Ailsa's heart beat hard.

"I call that pluck," said Hallam, "a dozen lancers without a carbine among them running at a company of infantry. I call that a plucky thing, don't you?"

She nodded.

Hallam shrugged. "He behaved badly to the sergeant, who said warmly: 'Tis a brave thing ye did, Private Ormond.' And 'Is it?' said Ormond with a sneer. 'I thought we were paid for doing such

things.' 'Och, ye sour-faced Sassenach!' said Sergeant Mulqueen, disgusted; and told me about the whole affair."

Ailsa had clasped her hands in her lap. The fingers were tightening till the delicate nails whitened.

But it was too late to speak of Berkley to Hallam now, too late to ask indulgence on the score of her friendship for a man who had mutilated it. Yet, she could scarcely endure the strain, the overmastering desire to say something in Berkley's behalf--to make him better understood--to explain to Hallam, and have Hallam explain to his troop that Berkley was his own most reckless enemy, that there was good in him, kindness, a capacity for better things----

Thought halted; was it that which, always latent within her bruised heart, stirred it eternally from its pain-weary repose--the belief, still existing, that there was something better in Berkley, that there did remain in him something nobler than he had ever displayed to her? For in some women there is no end to the capacity for mercy--where they love.

Hallam, hungry to touch her, had risen and seated himself on the flat arm of the chair in which she was sitting. Listlessly she abandoned her hand to him, listening all the time to the footsteps outside, hearing Hallam's low murmur; heard him lightly venturing

to hint of future happiness, not heeding him, attentive only to the footsteps outside.

"Private Berk--Ormond--" she calmly corrected herself--"has had no supper, has he?"

"Neither have I!" laughed Hallam. And Ailsa rose up, scarlet with annoyance, and called to a negro who was evidently bound kitchenward.

And half an hour later some supper was brought to Hallam; and the negro went out into the star-lit court to summon Berkley to the kitchen.

Ailsa, leaving Hallam to his supper, and wandering aimlessly through the rear gallery, encountered Letty coming from the kitchen.

"My trooper," said the girl, pink and happy, "is going to have _such_ a good supper! You know who I mean, dear--that Mr. Ormond----"

"I remember him," said Ailsa steadily. "I thought his name was Berkley."

"It is Ormond," said Letty in a low voice.

"Then I misunderstood. Is he here again?"

"Yes," ventured Letty, smiling; "he is escort to--your Captain."

Ailsa's expression was wintry. Letty, still smiling out of her velvet eyes, looked up confidently into Ailsa's face.

"Dear," she said, "I wish you could ever know how nice he is. . . .

But--I don't believe I could explain----"

"Nice? Who? Oh, your trooper!"

"You don't mistake me, do you?" asked the girl, flushing up. "I only call him so to you. I knew him in New York--and--he is so much of a man--so entirely good----"

She hesitated, seeing no answering sympathy in Ailsa's face, sighed, half turned with an unconscious glance at the closed door of the kitchen.

"What were you saying about--him?" asked Ailsa listlessly.

"Nothing--" said Letty timidly--"only, isn't it odd how matters are arranged in the army. My poor trooper--a gentleman born--is being fed in the kitchen; your handsome Captain--none the less gently born--is at supper in Dr. West's office. . . . They might easily have been friends in New York. . . . War is so strange, isn't it?"

Ailsa forced a smile; but her eyes remained on the door, behind which was a man who had held her in his arms. . . . And who might this girl be who came now to her with tales of Berkley's goodness, kindness--shy stories of the excellence of the man who had killed in her the joy of living--had nigh killed more than that? What did this strange, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl know about his goodness?--a girl of whom she had never even heard until she saw her in Dr. Benton's office!

And all the while she stood looking at the closed door, thinking, thinking.

They were off duty that night, but Letty was going back to a New Hampshire boy who was not destined to live very long, and whose father was on the way from Plymouth to see his eldest son--his eldest son who had never fought a battle, had never seen one, had never even fired his musket, but who lay dying in the nineteenth year of his age, colour corporal, loved of his guard and regiment.

"Baily asked for me," she said simply. "I can get some sleep sitting up, I think." She smiled. "I'm happier and--better for seeing my trooper. . . . I am--a--better--woman," she said serenely. Then, looking up with a gay, almost childish toss of her head, like a schoolgirl absolved of misdemeanours unnumbered, she smiled wisely at Ailsa, and went away to her dying boy from New Hampshire.

The closed door fascinated Ailsa, distressed, harrowed her, till she stood there twisting her hands between desire and pallid indecision.

Lead her limbs, for she could not stir them to go forward or to retire; miserably she stood there, swayed by fear and courage alternately, now rigid in bitter self-contempt, now shivering lest he fling open the door and find her there, and she see the mockery darkening his eyes----

And, "Oh-h!" she breathed, "is there nothing on earth but this shame for me?"

Suddenly she thought of Celia, and became frightened. Suppose Celia had gone to the kitchen! What would Celia think of her attitude toward the son of Constance Berkley? She had never told Celia that she had seen Berkley or that she even knew of his

whereabouts. What would Celia think!

In her sudden consternation she had walked straight to the closed door. She hesitated an instant; then she opened the door. And Berkley, seated as he had been seated that Christmas Eve, all alone by the burning candle, dropped his hands from his face and looked up. Then he rose and stood gazing at her.

She said, haughtily: "I suppose I am laying myself open to misconstruction and insult again by coming here to speak to you."

"Did you come to speak to me, Ailsa?"

"Yes. Celia Craig is here--upstairs. I have never told her that you have even been in this place. She does not know you are here now. If she finds out----"

"I understand," he said wearily. "Celia shall not be informed of my disgrace with you--unless you care to tell her."

"I do not care to tell her. Is there any reason to distress her with--such matters?"

"No," he said. "What do you wish me to do? Go out somewhere--"

He glanced vaguely toward the darkness. "I'll go anywhere you wish."

"Why did you come--again?" asked Ailsa coldly.

"Orders--" he shrugged--"I did not solicit the detail; I could not refuse. Soldiers don't refuse in the army."

She stood looking at the floor for a moment. Then: "Why have you changed your name?"

"It's not a permanent change," he said carelessly.

"Oh. You wish to remain unrecognised in your regiment?"

"While my service lasts."

Her lips formed the question again; and he understood, though she had not spoken.

"Why? Yes, I'll tell you," he said with a reckless laugh. "I'll tell you why I wear a new name. It's because I love my old one--and the mother who bore it--and from whom I received it! And it's because I won't risk disgracing it. You have asked, and

that's why! Because--_I'm afraid in battle_!--if you want to know!--afraid of getting hurt--wounded--killed! I don't know what I might do; I don't _know_! And if the world ever sees Private Ormond running away, they'll never know it was Constance Berkley's son. And _that's_ why I changed my name!"

"W-what?" she faltered. Then, revolted. "It is not true! You are _not_ afraid!"

"I tell you I am," he repeated with a mirthless laugh. "Don't you suppose I ought to know? I want to get out of bullet range every time I'm shot at. And--if anybody ever turns coward, I prefer that it should be trooper Ormond, not trooper Berkley. And that is the truth, Ailsa."

She was scarcely able to suppress her anger now. She looked at him, flushed, excited, furious.

"Why do you say such untruthful things to me! Who was it that fairly kicked his fellow troopers into charging infantry with nothing but lances against bullets?"

Amazed for a second, he burst into an abrupt laugh that rang harshly in the room.

"Who told you such cock-and-bull stories, Ailsa?"

"Didn't you do it? _Isn't_ it true?"

"Do what? Do what the Government pays me for doing? Yes, I happened to come up to the scratch that time. But I was scared, every inch of me--if you really want the truth."

"But--you _did_ it?"

He laughed again, harshly, but apparently puzzled by her attitude.

She came nearer, paler in her suppressed excitement.

"Private Ormond," she faltered, "the hour that you fail under fire is the hour when I--shall be able to--forget--you.

Not--until--then."

Neither moved. The slow, deep colour mounted to the roots of his hair; but she was white as death.

"Ailsa."

"Yes."

And suddenly he had dropped to one knee, and the hem of her gray garb was against his lips--and it was a thing of another age that he did, there on one knee at her feet, but it became him as it had become his ancestors. And she saw it, and, bending, laid her slim hands on his head.

After a long silence, her hands still resting on his dark hair, she found voice enough to speak.

"I know you now."

And, as he made no answer:

"It is there, in you--all that I believed. It was to that I--yielded--once."

She looked intently down at him.

"I think at last you have become--my champion. . . . Not my--destroyer. Answer me, Philip!"

He would not, or could not.

"I take you--for mine," she said. "Will you deny me?"

"No, Ailsa."

She said, steadily: "The other--the lesser happiness is to be--forgotten. Answer."

"It--must be."

She bent lower, whispering: "Is there no wedlock of the spirit?"

"That is all there ever was to hope for."

"Then--_will_ you--Philip?"

"Yes. Will _you_, Ailsa?"

"I--will."

He rose; her fingers slipped from his hair to his hands, and they stood, confronted.

She said in a dull voice: "I am engaged to--be--married to Captain Hallam."

"I know it."

She spoke again, very white.

"Can you tell me why you will not marry me?"

"No, I cannot tell you."

"I--would love you none the less. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, I do now. But I--cannot ask that of you."

"Yet--you would have--taken me without--marriage."

He said, quietly:

"Marriage--or love to the full, without it--God knows how right or wrong that may be. The world outlaws those who love without it--drives them out, excommunicates, damns. . . . It may be God

does, too; but--_I--don't--believe it_, Ailsa."

She said, whiter still: "Then I must not think of--what cannot be?"

"No," he said dully, "it cannot be."

She laid her hands against his lips in silence.

"Good night. . . . You won't leave me--too much--alone?"

"May I write to you, dear?"

"Please. And come when--when you can."

He laughed in the utter hopelessness of it all.

"Dear, I cannot come to you unless--_he_ comes."

At that the colour came back into her face.

Suddenly she stooped, touched his hands swiftly with her lips--the very ghost of contact--turned, and was gone.

Hallam's voice was hearty and amiable; also he welcomed her with a smile; but there seemed to be something hard in his eyes as he said:

"I began to be afraid that you'd gone to sleep, Ailsa. What the deuce has kept you? A sick man?"

"Y-es; he is--better--I think."

"That's good. I've only a minute or two left, and I wanted to speak--if you'll let me--about----"

"Can't you come again next week?" she asked.

"Well--of course, I'll do my best. I wanted to speak----"

"Don't say everything now," she protested, forcing a smile, "otherwise what excuse will you have for coming again?"

"Well--I wished to-- See here, Ailsa, will you let me speak about the _practical_ part of our future when I come next time?"

For a moment she could, not bring herself to the deception; but the memory of Berkley rendered her desperate.

"Yes--if you will bring back to Miss Lynden her trooper friend when you come again. Will you?"

"Who? Oh, Ormond. Yes, of course, if she wishes----"

But she could not endure her own dishonesty any longer.

"Captain Hallam," she said with stiffened lips, "I--I have just lied to you. It is not for Miss Lynden that I asked; it is for myself!"

He looked at her in a stunned sort of way. She said, forcing herself to meet his eyes:

"Trooper Ormond is your escort; don't you understand? I desire to see him again, because I knew him in New York."

"Oh," said Hallam slowly.

She stood silent, the colour racing through her cheeks. She could not, in the same breath, ask Hallam to release her. It was impossible. Nothing on earth could prevent his believing that it was because she wished to marry Berkley. And she was never to

marry Berkley. She knew it, now.

"Who is this Private Ormond, anyway?" asked Hallam, handsome eyes bent curiously on her.

And she said, calmly: "I think you did not mean to ask me that, Captain Hallam."

"Why not?"

"Because the man in question would have told you had he not desired the privilege of privacy--to which we all are entitled, I think."

"It seems to me," said Hallam, reddening, "that, under the circumstances, I myself have been invested by you with some privileges."

"Not yet," she returned quietly. And again her reply implied deceit; and she saw, too late, whither that reply led--where she was drifting, helpless to save herself, or Berkley, or this man to whom she had been betrothed.

"I've got to speak now," she began desperately calm. "I must tell you that I cannot marry you. I do not love you enough. I am

forced to say it. I was a selfish, weak, unhappy fool when I thought I could care enough for you to marry you. All the fault is mine; all the blame is on me. I am a despicable woman."

"Are you crazy, Ailsa!"

"Half crazed, I think. If you can, some day, try to forgive me--I should be very grateful."

"Do you mean to tell me that you--you are--have been--in love with this--this broken-down adventurer----"

"Yes. From the first second in my life that I ever saw him. Now you know the truth. And you will now consider me worthy of this--adventurer----"

"No," he replied. And thought a moment. Then he looked at her.

"I don't intend to give you up," he said.

"Captain Hallam, believe me, I am sorry----"

"I won't give you up," he repeated doggedly.

"You won't--release me?"

"No."

She said, with heightened colour: "I am dreadfully sorry--and bitterly ashamed. I deserve no mercy, no consideration at your hands. But--I must return your ring--" She slipped it from her finger, laid it on the table, placed the chain and locket beside it.

She said, wistfully: "I dare not hope to retain your esteem--I dare not say to you how much I really desire your forgiveness--your friendship----"

Suddenly he turned on her a face, red, distorted, with rage.

"Do you know what this means to me? It means ridicule in my regiment! What kind of figure do you think I shall cut after this? It's--it's a shame!--it's vile usage. I'll appear absurd--_absurd_! Do you understand?"

Shocked, she stared into his inflamed visage, which anger and tortured vanity had marred past all belief.

"Is _that_ why you care?" she asked slowly.

"Ailsa! Good God--I scarcely know what I'm saying----"

"I know."

She stepped back, eyes darkening to deepest violet--retreated, facing him, step by step to the doorway, through it; and left him standing there.

CHAPTER XIII

Berkley's first letter to her was written during that week of lovely weather, the first week in March. The birds never sang more deliriously, the regimental bands never played more gaily; every camp was astir in the warm sunshine with companies, regiments, brigades, or divisions drilling.

At the ceremonies of guard mount and dress parade the country was thronged with visitors from Washington, ladies in gay gowns and scarfs, Congressmen in silk hats and chokers, apparently forgetful of their undignified role in the late affair at Bull Run--even children with black mammies in scarlet turbans and white wool dresses came to watch a great army limbering up after a winter of inaction.

He wrote to her:

"Dearest, it has been utterly impossible for me to obtain leave of absence and a pass to go as far as the Farm Hospital. I tried to run the guard twice, but had to give it up. I'm going to try again as soon as there seems any kind of a chance.

"We have moved our camp. Why, heaven knows. If our general understood what cavalry is for we would have been out long ago--miles from here--if to do nothing more than make a few maps which, it seems, our august leaders entirely lack.

"During the night the order came: 'This division will move at four o'clock in the morning with two days' rations.' All night long we were at work with axe and hammer, tearing down quarters, packing stores, and loading our waggons.

"We have an absurd number of waggons. There is an infantry regiment camped near us that has a train of one hundred and thirty-six-mule teams to transport its household goods. It's the 77th New York,

"The next morning the sun rose on our army in motion. You say that I am a scoffer. I didn't scoff at that spectacle. We were on

Flint Hill; and, as far as we could see around us, the whole world was fairly crawling with troops. Over them a rainbow hung. Later it rained, as you know.

"I'm wet, Ailsa. The army for the first time is under shelter tents. The Sibley wall tents and wedge tents are luxuries of the past for officers and men alike.

"The army--that is, the bulk of it--camped at five. We--the cavalry--went on to see what we could see around Centreville; but the rebels had burned it, so we came back here where we don't belong--a thousand useless men armed with a thousand useless weapons. Because, dear, our lances are foolish things, picturesque but utterly unsuited to warfare in such a country as this.

"You see, I've become the sort of an ass who is storing up information and solving vast and intricate problems in order to be kind to my superiors when, struck with panic at their own tardily discovered incapacity, they rush to me in a body to ask me how to do it.

"Rush's Lancers are encamped near you now; our regiment is not far from them. If I can run the guard I'll do it. I'm longing to see you, dear.

"I've written to Celia, as you know, so she won't be too much astonished if I sneak into the gallery some night.

"I've seen a lot of Zouaves, the 5th, 9th, 10th, and other regiments, but not the 3rd. What a mark they make of themselves in their scarlet and blue. Hawkins' regiment, the 9th, is less conspicuous, wearing only the red headgear and facings, but Duryea's regiment is a sight! A magnificent one from the spectacular stand-point, but the regiments in blue stand a better chance of being missed by the rebel riflemen. I certainly wish Colonel Craig's Zouaves weren't attired like tropical butterflies. But for heaven's sake don't say this to Celia.

"Well, you see, I betray the cloven hoof of fear, even when I write you. It's a good thing that I know I am naturally a coward; because I may learn to be so ashamed of my legs that I'll never run at all, either way.

"Dear, I'm too honest with you to make promises, and far too intelligent not to know that when people begin shooting at each other somebody is likely to get hit. It is instinctive in me to avoid mutilation and extemporary death if I can do it. I realise what it means when the air is full of singing, buzzing noises; when twigs and branches begin to fall and rattle on my cap and saddle; when weeds and dead grass are snipped off short beside me; when every mud puddle is starred and splashed; when whack! smack! whack!

on the stones come flights of these things you hear about, and hear, and never see. And--it scares me.

"But I'm trying to figure out that, first, I am safer if I do what my superiors tell me to do; second, that it's a dog's life anyway; third, that it's good enough for me, so why run away from it?

"Some day some of these Johnnies will scare me so that I'll start after them. There's no fury like a man thoroughly frightened.

"Nobody has yet been hurt in any of the lancer regiments except one of Rush's men, who got tangled up in the woods and wounded himself with his own lance.

"Oh, these lances! And oh, the cavalry! And, alas! a general who doesn't know how to use his cavalry.

"No sooner does a cavalry regiment arrive than, bang! it's split up into troops--a troop to escort General A., another to gallop after General B., another to sit around headquarters while General C. dozes after dinner! And, if it's not split up, it's detailed bodily on some fool's job instead of being packed off under a line officer to find out what is happening just beyond the end of the commander's nose.

"The visitors like to see us drill--like to see us charge, red pennons flying, lances at rest. I like to see Rush's Lancers, too. But, all the same, sometimes when we go riding gaily down the road, some of those dingy, sunburnt Western regiments who have been too busy fighting to black their shoes line up along the road and repeat, monotonously:

"Who-ever-saw-a-dead-cavalryman?"

"It isn't what they say, Ailsa, it's the expression of their dirty faces that turns me red, sometimes, and sometimes incites me to wild mirth.

"I'm writing this squatted under my 'tente d'abri.' General McClellan, with a preposterous staff the size of a small brigade, has just passed at a terrific gallop--a handsome, mild-eyed man who has made us into an army, and who ornaments headquarters with an entire squadron of Claymore's 20th Dragoons and one of our own 8th Lancers. Well, some day he'll come to me and say: 'Ormond, I understand that there is only one man in the entire army fit to command it. Accept this cocked hat.'

"That detail would suit me, dear. I could get behind the casemates of Monroe and issue orders. I was cut out to sit in a good, thick casemate and bring this cruel war to an end.

"A terribly funny thing happened at Alexandria. A raw infantry regiment was camped near the seminary, and had managed to flounder through guard mount. The sentinels on duty kept a sharp lookout and turned out the guard every time a holiday nigger hove in sight; and sentinels and guard and officer were getting awfully tired of their mistakes; and the day was hot, and the sentinels grew sleepy.

"Then one sentry, dozing awake, happened to turn and glance toward the woods; and out of it, over the soft forest soil, and already nearly on top of him, came a magnificent cavalcade at full gallop--the President, and Generals McClellan and Benjamin Butler leading.

"Horror paralyzed him, then he ran toward the guard house, shrieking at the top of his lungs:

"Great God! Turn out the guard! Here comes Old Abe and Little Mac and Beast Butler!"

"And that's all the camp gossip and personal scandal that I have to relate to you, dear.

"I'll run the guard if I can, so help me Moses!"

"And I am happier than I have ever been in all my life. If I don't run under fire you have promised not to stop loving me. That is the bargain, remember.

"Here comes your late lamented. I'm no favorite of his, nor he of mine. He did me a silly trick the other day--had me up before the Colonel because he said that it had been reported to him that I had enlisted under an assumed name.

"I had met the Colonel. He looked at me and said:

"'Is Ormond your name?'"

[Illustration: "'Is Ormond your name?'"]

"I said: 'It is, partly.'

"He said: 'Then it is sufficient to fight under.'

"Ailsa, I am going to tell you something. It has to do with me, as you know me, and it has to do with Colonel Arran.

"I'm afraid I'm going to hurt you; but I'm also afraid it will be

necessary.

"Colonel Arran is your friend. But, Ailsa, I am his implacable enemy. Had I dreamed for one moment that the Westchester Horse was to become the 10th troop of Arran's Lancers, I would never have joined it.

"It was a bitter dose for me to swallow when my company was sworn into the United States service under this man.

"Since, I have taken the matter philosophically. He has not annoyed me, except by being alive on earth. He showed a certain primitive decency in not recognizing me when he might have done it in a very disagreeable fashion. I think he was absolutely astonished to see me there; but he never winked an eyelash. I give the devil his due.

"All this distresses you, dear. But I cannot help it; you would have to know, sometime, that Colonel Arran and I are enemies. So let it go at that; only, remembering it, avoid always any uncomfortable situation which must result in this man and myself meeting under your roof."

His letter ended in lighter vein--a gay message to Celia, a cordial one to Letty, and the significant remark that he expected to see

her very soon.

The next night he tried to run the guard, and failed.

She had written to him, begging him not to; urging the observance of discipline, while deploring their separation--a sweet, confused letter, breathing in every line her solicitation for him, her new faith and renewed trust in him.

Concerning what he had told her about his personal relations with Colonel Arran she had remained silent--was too unhappy and astonished to reply. Thinking of it later, it recalled to her mind Celia's studied avoidance of any topic in which Colonel Arran figured. She did not make any mental connection between Celia's dislike for the man and Berkley's--the coincidence merely made her doubly unhappy.

And, one afternoon when Letty was on duty and she and Celia were busy with their mending in Celia's room, she thought about Berkley's letter and his enmity, and remembered Celia's silent aversion at the same moment.

"Celia," she said, looking up, "would you mind telling me what it is that you dislike about my old and very dear friend, Colonel Arran?"

Celia continued her needlework for a few moments. Then, without raising her eyes, she said placidly:

"You have asked me that befo', Honey-bird."

"Yes, dear. . . . You know it is not impertinent curiosity----"

"I know what it is, Honey-bee. But you can not he'p this gentleman and myse'f to any ground of common understanding."

"I am so sorry," sighed Ailsa, resting her folded hands on her work and gazing through the open window.

Celia continued to sew without glancing up. Presently she said:

"I reckon I'll have to tell you something about Colonel Arran after all. I've meant to for some time past. Because--because my silence condemns him utterly; and that is not altogether just."

She bent lower over her work; her needle travelled more slowly as she went on speaking:

"In my country, when a gentleman considers himse'f aggrieved, he asks fo' that satisfaction which is due to a man of his

quality. . . . But Colonel Arran did not ask. And when it was offered, he refused." Her lips curled. "He cited the Law," she said with infinite contempt.

"But Colonel Arran is not a Southerner," observed Ailsa quietly.

"You know how all Northerners feel----"

"It happened befo' you were born, Honey-bud. Even the No'th recognised the code then."

"Is that why you dislike Colonel Arran? Because he refused to challenge or be challenged when the law of the land forbade private murder?"

Celia's cheeks flushed deeply; she tightened her lips; then:

"The law is not made fo' those in whom the higher law is inherent," she said calmly. "It is made fo' po' whites and negroes."

"Celia!"

"It is true, Honey-bird. When a gentleman breaks the law that makes him one, it is time fo' him to appeal to the lower law. And Colonel Arran did so."

"What was his grievance?"

"A deep one, I reckon. He had the right on his side--and his own law to defend it, and he refused. And the consequences were ve'y dreadful."

"To--him?"

"To us all. . . . His punishment was certain."

"Was he punished?"

"Yes. Then, in his turn, he punished--terribly. But not as a gentleman should. Fo' in that code which gove'ns us, no man can raise his hand against a woman. He must endure all things; he may not defend himse'f at any woman's expense; he may not demand justice at the expense of any woman. It is the privilege of his caste to endure with dignity what cannot be remedied or revenged except through the destruction of a woman. . . . And Colonel Arran invoked the lower law; and the justice that was done him destroyed--a woman."

She looked up steadily into Ailsa's eyes.

"She was only a young girl, Honey-bud--too young to marry anybody, too inexperienced to know her own heart until it was too late.

"And Colonel Arran came; and he was ve'y splendid, and handsome, and impressive in his cold, heavy dignity, and ve'y certain that the child must marry him--so certain that she woke up one day and found that she had done it. And learned that she did not love him.

"There was a boy cousin. He was reckless, I reckon; and she was ve'y unhappy; and one night he found her crying in the garden; and there was a ve'y painful scene, and she let him kiss the hem of her petticoat on his promise to go away fo' ever. And--Colonel Arran caught him on his knees, with the lace to his lips--and the child wife crying. . . . He neither asked nor accepted satisfaction; he threatened the--_law_! And that settled him with her, I reckon, and she demanded her freedom, and he refused, and she took it.

"Then she did a ve'y childish thing; she married the boy--or supposed she did----"

Celia's violet eyes grew dark with wrath:

"And Colonel Arran went into co't with his lawyers and his witnesses and had the divorce set aside--and publicly made this

silly child her lover's mistress, and their child nameless! That was the justice that the law rendered Colonel Arran. And now you know why I hate him--and shall always hate and despise him."

Ailsa's head was all awirl; lips parted, she stared at Celia in stunned silence, making as yet no effort to reconcile the memory of the man she knew with this cold, merciless, passionless portrait.

Nor did the suspicion occur to her that there could be the slightest connection between her sister-in-law's contempt for Colonel Arran and Berkley's implacable enmity.

All the while, too, her clearer sense of right and justice cried out in dumb protest against the injury done to the man who had been her friend, and her parents' friend--kind, considerate, loyal, impartially just in all his dealings with her and with the world, as far as she had ever known.

From Celia's own showing the abstract right and justice of the matter had been on his side; no sane civilisation could tolerate the code that Celia cited. The day of private vengeance was over; the era of duelling was past in the North--was passing in the South. And, knowing Colonel Arran, she knew also that twenty odd years ago his refusal to challenge had required a higher form of courage than to face the fire of a foolish boy's pistol.

And now, collecting her disordered thoughts, she began to understand what part emotion and impulse had played in the painful drama--how youthful ignorance and false sentiment had combined to invest a silly but accidental situation with all the superficial dignity of tragedy.

What must it have meant to Colonel Arran, to this quiet, slow, respectable man of the world, to find his girl wife crying in the moonlight, and a hot-headed boy down on his knees, mumbling the lace edge of her skirts?

What must it have meant to him--for the chances were that he had not spoken the first word--to be confronted by an excited, love-smitten, reckless boy, and have a challenge flung in his face before he had uttered a word.

No doubt his calm reply was to warn the boy to mind his business under penalty of law. No doubt the exasperated youth defied him--insulted him--declared his love--carried the other child off her feet with the exaggerated emotion and heroics. And, once off their feet, she saw how the tide had swept them together--swept them irrevocably beyond reason and recall.

Ailsa rose and stood by the open window, looking out across the hills; but her thoughts were centred on Colonel Arran's tragedy,

and the tragedy of those two hot-headed children whom his punishment had out-lawed.

Doubtless his girl wife had told him how the boy had come to be there, and that she had banished him; but the clash between maturity and adolescence is always inevitable; the misunderstanding between ripe experience and Northern logic, and emotional inexperience and Southern impulse was certain to end in disaster.

Ailsa considered; and she knew that now her brief for Colonel Arran was finished, for beyond the abstract right she had no sympathy with the punishment he had dealt out, even though his conscience and civilisation and the law of the land demanded the punishment of these erring' ones.

No, the punishment seemed too deeply tainted with vengeance for her to tolerate.

A deep unhappy sigh escaped her. She turned mechanically, seated herself, and resumed her sewing.

"I suppose I ought to be asleep," she said. "I am on duty to-night, and they've brought in so many patients from the new regiments."

Celia bent and bit off her thread, then passing the needle into the hem, laid her work aside.

"Honey-bud," she said, "you are ve'y tired. If you'll undress I'll give you a hot bath and rub you and brush your hair."

"Oh, Celia, will you? I'd feel so much better." She gave a dainty little shudder and made a wry face, adding:

"I've had so many dirty, sick men to cleanse--oh, incredibly dirty and horrid!--poor boys--it doesn't seem to be their fault, either; and they are so ashamed and so utterly miserable when I am obliged to know about the horror of their condition. . . . Dear, it will be angelic of you to give me a good, hot scrubbing. I could go to sleep if you would."

"Of co'se I will," said Celia simply. And, when Ailsa was ready to call her in she lifted the jugs of water which a negro had brought--one cold, one boiling hot--entered Ailsa's room, filled the fiat tin tub; and, when Ailsa stepped into it, proceeded to scrub her as though she had been two instead of twenty odd.

Then, her glowing body enveloped in a fresh, cool sheet, she lay back and closed her eyes while Celia brushed the dull gold masses of her hair.

"Honey-bee, they say that all the soldiers are in love with you, even my po' Confederate boys in Ward C. Don't you dare corrupt their loyalty!"

"They are the dearest things--all of them," smiled Ailsa sleepily, soothed by the skilful brushing. "I have never had one cross word, one impatient look from Union or Confederate." She added: "They say in Washington that we women are not needed--that we are in the way--that the sick don't want us. . . . Some very important personage from Washington came down to the General Hospital and announced that the Government was going to get rid of all women nurses. And such a dreadful row those poor sick soldiers made! Dr. West told us; he was there at the time. And it seems that the personage went back to Washington with a very different story to tell the powers that be. So I suppose they've concluded to let us alone."

"It doesn't surprise me that a Yankee gove'nment has no use fo' women," observed Celia.

"Hush, dear. That kind of comment won't do. Besides, some horrid stories were afloat about some of the nurses not being all they ought to be."

"That sounds ve'y Yankee, too!"

"Celia! And perhaps it was true that one or two among thousands might not have been everything they should have been," admitted Ailsa, loyal to her government in everything. "And perhaps one or two soldiers were insolent; but neither Letty Lynden nor I have ever heard one unseemly word from the hundreds and hundreds of soldiers we have attended, never have had the slightest hint of disrespect from them."

"They certainly do behave ve'y well," conceded Celia, brushing away vigorously. "They behave like our Virginians."

Ailsa laughed, then, smiling reflectively, glanced at her hand which still bore the traces of a healed scar. Celia noticed her examining the slender, uplifted hand, and said:

"You promised to tell me how you got that scar, Honey-bud."

"I will, now--because the man who caused it has gone North."

"A--man!"

"Yes, poor fellow. When the dressings were changed the agony

crazed him and he sometimes bit me. I used to be so annoyed," she added mildly, "and I used to shake my forefinger at him and say, 'Now it's got to be done, Jones; will you promise not to bite me.' And the poor fellow would promise with tears in his eyes--and then he'd forget--poor boy----"

"I'd have slapped him," said Celia, indignantly. "What a darling you are, Ailsa! . . . Now bundle into bed," she added, "because you haven't any too much time to sleep, and poor little Letty Lynden will be half dead when she comes off duty."

Letty really appeared to be half dead when she arrived, and bent wearily over the bed where Ailsa now lay in calm-breathing, rosy slumber.

"Oh, you sweet thing!" she murmured to herself, "you can sleep for two hours yet, but you don't know it." And, dropping her garments from her, one by one, she bathed and did up her hair and crept in beside Ailsa very softly, careful not to arouse her.

But Ailsa, who slept lightly, awoke, turned on her pillow, passed one arm around Letty's dark curls.

"I'll get up," she said drowsily. "Why didn't Flannery call me?"

"You can sleep for an hour or two yet, darling," cooed Letty, nestling close to her. "Mrs. Craig has taken old Bill Symonds, and they'll be on duty for two hours more."

"How generous of Celia--and of old Symonds, too. Everybody seems to be so good to me here."

"Everybody adores you, dear," whispered Letty, her lips against Ailsa's flushed cheek. "Don't you know it?"

Ailsa laughed; and the laugh completed her awakening past all hope of further slumber.

"You quaint little thing," she said, looking at Letty. "You certainly are the most engaging girl I ever knew."

Letty merely lay and looked her adoration, her soft cheek pillowed on Ailsa's arm. Presently she said:

"Do you remember the first word you ever spoke to me?"

"Yes, I do."

"And--you asked me to come and see you."

"Who wouldn't ask you--little rosebud?"

But Letty only sighed and closed her eyes; nor did she awaken when Ailsa cautiously withdrew her arm and slipped out of bed.

She still had an hour and more; she decided to dress and go out for a breath of fresh, sweet air to fortify her against the heavy atmosphere of the sick wards.

It was not yet perfectly dark; the thin edge of the new moon traced a pale curve in the western sky; frogs were trilling; a night-bird sang in a laurel thicket unceasingly.

The evening was still, but the quiet was only comparative because, always, all around her, the stirring and murmur of the vast army never entirely ended.

But the drums and bugles, answering one another from hill to hill, from valley to valley, had ceased; she saw the reddening embers of thousands of camp fires through the dusk; every hill was jewelled, every valley gemmed.

In the darkness she could hear the ground vibrate under the steady tread of a column of infantry passing, but she could not see them--could distinguish no motion against the black background of the woods.

Standing there on the veranda, she listened to them marching by. From the duration of the sound she judged it to be only one regiment, probably a new one arriving from the North.

A little while afterward she heard on some neighbouring hillside the far outbreak of hammering, the distant rattle of waggons, the clash of stacked muskets. Then, in sudden little groups, scattered starlike over the darkness, camp fires twinkled into flame. The new regiment had pitched its tents.

It was a pretty sight; she walked out along the fence to see more clearly, stepping aside to avoid collision with a man in the dark, who was in a great hurry--a soldier, who halted to make his excuses, and, instead, took her into his arms with a breathless exclamation.

"Philip!" she faltered, trembling all over.

"Darling! I forgot I was not to touch you!" He crushed her hands swiftly to his lips and let them drop.

"My little Ailsa! My--little--Ailsa!" he repeated under his breath--and caught her to him again.

"Oh--darling--we mustn't," she protested faintly. "Don't you remember, Philip? Don't you remember, dear, what we are to be to one another?"

He stood, face pressed against her burning cheeks; then his arm encircling her waist fell away.

"You're right, dear," he said with a sigh so naively robust, so remarkably hearty, that she laughed outright--a very tremulous and uncertain laugh.

"What a tragically inclined boy! I never before heard a 'thunderous sigh'; but I had read of them in poetry. Philip, tell me instantly how you came here!"

"Ran the guard," he admitted.

"No! Oh, dear, oh, dear!--and I told you not to. Philip! _Philip_! Do you want to get shot?"

"Now you know very well I don't," he said, laughing. "I spend every minute trying not to. . . . And, Ailsa, what do you think? A little while ago when I was skulking along fences and lurking in ditches--all for your sake, ungrateful fair one!--tramp--tramp--tramp comes a column out of the darkness! 'Lord help us,' said I, 'it's the police guard, or some horrible misfortune, and I'll never see my Ailsa any more!' Then I took a squint at 'em, and I saw officers riding, with about a thousand yards of gold lace on their sleeves, and I saw their music trudging along with that set of silver chimes aloft between two scarlet yaks' tails; and I saw the tasselled fezzes and the white gaiters and--'Aha!' said I--'the Zou-Zous! But _which_?'

"And, by golly, I made out the number painted white on their knapsacks; and, Ailsa, it was the 3d Zouaves, Colonel Craig!--just arrived! And there--on that hill--are their fires!"

"Oh, Phil!" she exclaimed in rapture, "how heavenly for Celia! I'm perfectly crazy to see Curt and Steve----"

"Please transfer a little of that sweet madness to me."

"Dear--I can't, can I?"

But she let him have her hands; and, resting beside him on the rail

fence, bent her fair head as he kissed her joined hands, let it droop lower, lower, till her cheek brushed his. Then, turning very slowly, their lips encountered, rested, till the faint fragrance of hers threatened his self-control.

She opened her blue eyes as he raised his head, looking at him vaguely in the dusk, then very gently shook her head and rested one cheek on her open palm.

"I don't know," she sighed. "I--don't--know--" and closed her lids once more.

"Know what, dearest of women?"

"What is going to happen to us, Phil. . . . It seems incredible--after our vows--after the lofty ideals we----"

"The ideals are there," he said in a low voice. And, in his tone there was a buoyancy, a hint of something new to her--something almost decisive, something of protection which began vaguely to thrill her, as though that guard which she had so long mounted over herself might be relieved--the strain relaxed---the duty left to him.

She laid one hand on his arm, looked up, searching his face,

hesitated. A longing to relax the tension of self-discipline came over her--to let him guard them both--to leave all to him--let him fight for them both. It was a longing to find security in the certainty of his self-control, a desire to drift, and let him be responsible, to let him control the irresponsibility within her, the unwisdom, the delicate audacity, latent, mischievous, that needed a reversal of the role of protector and protected to blossom deliciously into the coquetry that she had never dared.

"Are you to be trusted?" she asked innocently.

"Yes, at last. You know it. Even if I----"

"Yes, dear."

She considered him with a new and burning curiosity. It was the feminine in her, wondering, not yet certain, whether it might safely dare.

"I suppose I've made an anchorite out of you," she ventured.

"You can judge," he said, laughing; and had her in his arms again, and kissed her consenting lips and palms, and looked down into the sweet eyes; and she smiled back at him, confident, at rest.

"What has wrought this celestial change in you, Phil?" she whispered, listlessly humourous.

"What change?"

"The spiritual."

"Is there one? I seem to kiss you just as ardently."

"I know. . . . But--for the first time since I ever saw you--I feel that I am safe in the world. . . . It may annoy me."

He laughed.

"I may grow tired of it," she insisted, watching him. "I may behave like a naughty, perverse, ungrateful urchin, and kick and scream and bite. . . . But you won't let me be hurt, will you?"

"No, child." His voice was laughing at her, but his eyes were curiously grave.

She put both arms up around his neck with a quick catch of her breath.

"I do love you--I do love you. I know it now, Phil--I know it as I never dreamed of knowing it. . . . You will never let me be hurt, will you? Nothing can harm me now, can it?"

"Nothing, Ailsa."

She regarded him dreamily. Sometimes her blue eyes wandered toward the stars, sometimes toward the camp fires on the hill.

"Perfect--perfect belief in--your goodness--to me," she murmured vaguely. "Now I shall--repay you--by perversity--misbehaviour--I don't know what--I don't know--what----"

Her lids closed; she yielded to his embrace; one slim, detaining hand on his shoulder held her closer, closer.

"You must--never--go away," her lips formed.

But already he was releasing her, pale but coolly master of the situation. Acquiescent, inert, she lay in his arms, then straightened and rested against the rail beside her.

Presently she smiled to herself, looked at him, still smiling.

"Shall we go into Dr. West's office and have supper, Phil? I'm on duty in half an hour and my supper must be ready by this time; and I'm simply dying to have you make up for the indignity of the kitchen."

"You ridiculous little thing!"

"No, I'm not. I could weep with rage when I think of you in the kitchen and--and-- Oh, never mind. Come, will you?" And she held out her hand.

Her supper was ready, as she had predicted, and she delightedly made room for him beside her on the bench, and helped him to freshly baked bread and ancient tinned vegetables, and some doubtful boiled meat, all of which he ate with an appetite and a reckless and appreciative abandon that fascinated her.

"Darling!" she whispered in consternation, "don't they give you anything in camp?"

"Sometimes," he enunciated, chewing vigorously on the bread. "We don't get much of this, darling. And the onions have all sprouted, and the potatoes are rotten."

She regarded him for a moment, then laughed hysterically.

"I _beg_ your pardon, Phil, but somehow this reminds me of our cook feeding her policeman:--just for one tiny second, darling----"

They abandoned any effort to control their laughter. Ailsa had become transfigured into a deliciously mischievous and bewildering creature, brilliant of lip and cheek and eye, irresponsible, provoking, utterly without dignity or discipline.

She taunted him with his appetite, jeered at him for his recent and marvellous conversion to respectability, dared him to make love to her, provoked him at last to abandon his plate and rise and start toward her. And, of course, she fled, crying in consternation:

"Hush, Philip! You _mustn't_ make such a racket or they'll put us both out!"--keeping the table carefully between them, dodging every strategy of his, every endeavour to make her prisoner, quick, graceful, demoralising in her beauty and abandon. They behaved like a pair of very badly brought up children, until she was in real terror of discovery.

"Dearest," she pleaded, "if you will sit down and resume your gnawing on that crust, I'll promise not to torment you. . . . I will, really. Besides, it's within a few minutes of my tour of duty----"

She stopped, petrified, as a volley of hoof-beats echoed outside, the clash of arms and accoutrements rang close by the porch.

"Phil!" she gasped.

And the door opened and Colonel Arran walked in.

There was a dreadful silence. Arran stood face to face with Berkley, looked him squarely in the eye where he stood at salute. Then, as though he had never before set eyes on him, Arran lifted two fingers to his visor mechanically, turned to Ailsa, uncovered, and held out both his hands.

"I had a few moments, Ailsa," he said quietly. "I hadn't seen you for so long. Are you well?"

She was almost too frightened to answer; Berkley stood like a statue, awaiting dismissal, and later the certain consequences of guard running.

And, aware of her fright, Arran turned quietly to Berkley:

"Private Ormond," he said, "there is a led-horse in my escort, in

charge of Private Burgess. It is the easier and--safer route to camp. You may retire."

Berkley's expression was undecipherable as he saluted, shot a glance at Ailsa, turned sharply, and departed.

"Colonel Arran," she said miserably, "it was all my fault. I am too ashamed to look at you."

"Let me do what worrying is necessary," he said quietly. "I am--not unaccustomed to it. . . . I suppose he ran the guard."

She did not answer.

The ghost of a smile--a grim one--altered the Colonel's expression for a second, then faded. He looked at Ailsa curiously. Then:

"Have you anything to tell me that--perhaps I may be entitled to know about, Ailsa?"

"No."

"I see. I beg your pardon. If you ever are--perplexed--in doubt--I shall always----"

"Thank you," she said faintly. . . . "And--I am so sorry----"

"So am I. I'm sorrier than you know--about more matters than you know, Ailsa--" He softly smote his buckskin-gloved hands together, gazing at vacancy. Then lifted his head and squared his heavy shoulders.

"I thought I'd come when I could. The chances are that the army will move if this weather continues. The cavalry will march out anyway. So I thought I'd come over for a few moments, Ailsa. . . . Are you sure you are quite well? And not overdoing it? You certainly look well; you appear to be in perfect health. . . . I am very much relieved. . . . And--don't worry. Don't cherish apprehension about--anybody." He added, more to himself than to her: "Discipline will be maintained--_must_ be maintained. There are more ways to do it than by military punishments, I know that now."

He looked up, held out his hand, retained hers, and patted it gently.

"Don't worry, child," he said, "don't worry." And went out to the porch thoughtfully, gazing straight ahead of him as his horse was brought up. Then, gathering curb and snaffle, he set toe to

stirrup and swung up into his saddle.

"Ormond!" he called.

Berkley rode up and saluted.

"Ride with me," said Colonel Arran calmly.

"Sir?"

"Rein up on the left." And, turning in his saddle, he motioned back his escort twenty paces to the rear. Then he walked his big, bony roan forward.

"Ormond?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"You ran the guard?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Why?"

Berkley was silent.

The Colonel turned in his saddle and scrutinised him. The lancer's visage was imperturbable.

"Ormond," he said in a low voice, "whatever you think of me--whatever your attitude toward me is, I would like you to believe that I wish to be your friend."

Berkley's expression remained unchanged.

"It is my desire," said the older man, "my--very earnest--desire."

The young lancer was mute.

Arran's voice fell still lower:

"Some day--if you cared to--if you could talk over some--matters with me, I would be very glad. Perhaps you don't entirely understand me. Perhaps I have given you an erroneous impression concerning--matters--which it is too late to treat differently--in the light of riper experience--and in a knowledge born of years--solitary and barren years----"

He bent his gray head thoughtfully, then, erect in his saddle again:

"I would like to be your friend," he said in a voice perceptibly under control.

"Why?" asked Berkley harshly. "Is there any reason on God's earth why I could ever forgive you?"

"No; no reason perhaps. Yet, you are wrong."

"Wrong!"

"I say so in the light of the past, Berkley. Once I also believed that a stern, uncompromising attitude toward error was what God required of an upright heart."

"Error! D-do you admit that?" stammered Berkley. "Are you awake at last to the devilry that stirred you--the damnable, misguided, distorted conscience that twisted you into a murderer of souls? By God, are you alive to what you did to--her?"

Colonel Arran, upright in his saddle and white as death, rode straight on in front of him.. Beside him, knee to knee, rode Berkley, his features like marble, his eyes ablaze.

"I am not speaking for myself," he said between his teeth, "I am not reproaching you, cursing you, for what you have done to me--for the ruin you have made of life for me, excommunicating me from every hope, outlawing me, branding me! I am thinking, now, only of my mother. God!--to think--to _think_ of it--of her----"

Arran turned on him a face so ghastly that the boy was silenced.

Then the older man said:

"Do you not know that the hell men make for others is what they are destined to burn in sooner or later? Do you think you can tell me anything of eternal punishment?" He laughed a harsh, mirthless laugh. "Do you not think I have learned by this time that vengeance is God's--and that He never takes it? It is man alone who takes it, and suffers it. Humanity calls it justice. But I have learned that what the laws of men give you is never yours to take; that the warrant handed you by men is not for you to execute. I--have--learned--many things in the solitary years, Berkley. . . . But this--what I am now saying to you, here under the stars--is the first time I have ever, even to myself, found courage to confess Christ."

Very far away to the south a rocket rose--a slender thread of fire. Then, to the northward, a tiny spark grew brighter, flickered, swung in an arc to right, to left, dipped, soared, hung motionless,

dipped again to right, to left, tracing faint crimson semicircles
against the sky.

Two more rockets answered, towering, curving, fading, leaving blue
stars floating in the zenith.

And very, very far away there was a dull vibration of thunder, or
of cannon.

CHAPTER XIV

The tremendous exodus continued; regiment after regiment packed
knapsacks, struck tents, loaded their waggons and marched back
through the mud toward Alexandria, where transports were waiting in
hundreds.

The 3rd Zouaves were scheduled to leave early. Celia had only a
few hours now and then in camp with husband and son. Once or twice
they came to the hospital in the bright spring weather where new
blossoms on azalea and jasmine perfumed the fields and flowering
peach orchards turned all the hills and valleys pink.

Walking with her husband and son that last lovely evening before
the regiment left, a hand of each clasped in her own, she strove
very hard to keep up the gaiety of appearances, tried with all her

might to keep back the starting tears, steady the lip that quivered, the hands that trembled locked in theirs.

They were walking together in a secluded lane that led from behind the Farm Hospital barns to a little patch of woodland through which a clear stream sparkled, a silent, intimate, leafy oasis amid an army-ridden desert, where there was only a cow to stare at them, knee deep in young mint, only a shy cardinal bird to interrupt them with its exquisite litany.

Their talk had been of Paige and Marye, of Paigecourt and the advisability of selling all stock, dismissing the negroes, and closing the place with the exception of the overseer's house. And Celia had made arrangements to attend to it.

"I certainly do despise travelling," she said, "but while I'm so near, I reckon I'd better use my pass and papers and try to go through to Paigecourt. It's just as well to prepare for the impossible, I suppose."

Colonel Craig polished his eye-glasses, adjusted them, and examined the official papers that permitted his wife to go to her estate, pack up certain family papers, discharge the servants, close the house, and return through the Union lines carrying only personal baggage.

He said without enthusiasm: "It's inside their lines. To go there isn't so difficult, but how about coming back? I don't want you to go, Celia."

She explained in detail that there would be no difficulty--a little proudly, too, when she spoke of her personal safety among her own people.

"I understand all that," he said patiently, "but nobody except the commander-in-chief knows where this army is going. I don't want you to be caught in the zone of operations."

She flushed up with a defiant little laugh. "The war isn't going to Paigecourt, anyway," she said.

He smiled with an effort. "I am not sure, dearest. All I am sure of is that we march in the morning, and go aboard ship at Alexandria. I don't know where we are expected to land, or where we are going to march after we do land." . . . He smiled again, mischievously. "Even if you believe that a Yankee army is not likely to get very far into Virginia, Paigecourt is too near Richmond for me to feel entirely sure that you may not have another visit from Stephen and me before you start North."

"Listen to the Yankee!" she cried, laughing gaily to hide the sudden dimness in her blue eyes. "My darling Yankee husband is ve'y absurd, and he doesn't suspect it! Why! don't you perfec'ly ridiculous Zouaves know that you'll both be back in New York befo' I am--and all tired out keeping up with the pace yo' general sets you?"

But when it was time to say good-bye once more, her limbs grew weak and she leaned heavily on husband and son, her nerveless feet dragging across the spring turf.

"Oh, Curt, Curt," she faltered, her soft cheeks pressed against the stiff bullion on his sleeve and collar, "if only I had the wretched consolation of sending you away to fight fo' the Right--fo' God and country--There, darling! Fo'give me--fo'give me. I am yo' wife first of all--first of all, Curt. And that even comes befo' country and--God!--Yes, it does! it does, dear. You are all three to me--I know no holier trinity than husband, God, and native land. . . . Must you go so soon? So soon? . . . Where is my boy--I'm crying so I can't see either of you--Stephen! Mother's own little boy--mother's little, little boy--oh, it is ve'y hard--ve'y hard----"

[Illustration: "Must you go so soon? So soon?"]

"Steve--I think you'd better kiss your mother now"--his voice

choked and he turned his back and stood, the sun glittering on the gold and scarlet of his uniform.

Mother and son clung, parted, clung; then Colonel Craig's glittering sleeve was flung about them both.

"I'll try to bring him through all right, Celia. You must believe that we are coming back."

So they parted.

And at three in the morning, Celia, lying in her bed, started to a sitting posture. Very far away in the night reveille was sounding for some regiment outward bound; and then the bugles blew for another regiment and another, and another, until everywhere the darkened world grew gaily musical with the bugle's warning.

She crept to the window; it was too dusky to see. But in obscurity she felt that not far away husband and son were passing through darkness toward the mystery of the great unknown; and there, in her night-dress, she knelt by the sill, hour after hour, straining her eyes and listening until dawn whitened the east and the rivers began to marshal their ghostly hosts. Then the sun rose, annihilating the phantoms of the mist and shining on columns of marching men, endless lines of waggons, horse-batteries, foot

artillery, cavalry, engineers with gabions and pontoons, and entire divisions of blue infantry, all pouring steadily toward Alexandria and the river, where lay the vast transport fleet at anchor, destined to carry them whither their Maker and commanding general willed that they should go.

To Celia's wet eyes there seemed to be little variation in the dull blue columns with the glitter of steel flickering about them; yet, here and there a brilliant note appeared--pennons fluttering above lances, scarfs and facings of some nearer foot battery, and, far away toward Alexandria, vivid squares of scarlet in a green field, dimmed very little by the distance. Those were zouaves--her own, or perhaps the 5th, or the 9th from Roanoke, or perhaps the 14th Brooklyn--she could not know, but she never took her eyes from the distant blocks and oblongs of red against the green until the woods engulfed them.

Ailsa still lay heavily asleep. Celia opened the door and called her to the window.

"Honey-bud, darling," she whispered tearfully, "did you know the Lancers are leaving?"

Ailsa's eyes flew wide open:

"Not _his_ regiment!"

"Are there two?"

"Yes," said Ailsa, frightened. "That must be the 6th Pennsylvania. . . . Because I think--somebody would have told me--Colonel Arran----"

She stared through eyes from which the mist of slumber had entirely cleared away. Then she sprang from her bed to the window:

"Oh--_oh_!" she said half to herself, "he wouldn't go away without saying something to me! He couldn't! . . . And--oh, dear--oh dear, their pennons _are_ swallow-tailed and scarlet! It looks like his regiment--it does--it does! . . . But he wouldn't go without speaking to me----"

Celia turned and looked at her.

"Do you mean Colonel Arran?" And saw that she did not.

For a while they stood there silently together, the soft spring wind blowing over their bare necks and arms, stirring the frail, sheer fabric of their night-robos.

Suddenly the stirring music of cavalry trumpets along the road below startled them; they turned swiftly to look out upon a torrent of scarlet pennons and glancing lance points--troop after troop of dancing horses and blue-clad riders, their flat forage caps set rakishly, bit and spur and sabre hilt glistening, the morning sun flashing golden on the lifted trumpets.

On they came, on, on, horses' heads tossing, the ground shaking with the mellow sound of four thousand separate hoofs,--and passed, troop on troop, a lengthening, tossing wave of scarlet across the verdure.

Then, far away in the column, a red lance pennon swung in a circle, a blue sleeve shot up in salute and adieu. And Ailsa knew that Berkley had seen her, and that the brightness of the young world was leaving her, centred there in the spark of fire that tipped his lance.

Now she saw her lover turn in his saddle and, sitting so, ride on and on, his tall lance slanting from stirrup boot to arm loop, the morning sun bright across his face, and touching each metal button with fire from throat to belt.

So her lancer rode away into the unknown; and she sat on the edge

of her bed, crying, until it was time to go on duty and sit beside the dying in the sick wards.

They brought her his last letter that evening.

"You wicked little thing," it ran, "if you hadn't taught me self-respect I'd have tried to run the guard to-night, and would probably have been caught and drummed out or shot. We're in a bustle; orders, totally unexpected, attach us to Porter's Corps, Sykes's division of regulars. Warren's brigade, which includes, I believe, the 5th Zouaves, the 10th Zouaves, 6th Pennsylvania Lancers, and 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery.

"We've scarcely time to get off; our baggage will never be ready, and how we're going to get to Alexandria and aboard ship is more than I know.

"And I'm simply furious; I'd counted on a dramatic situation, Ailsa--the soldiers farewell, loud sobs, sweetheart faints, lancer dashes away unmanly tears--'Be strong, be br-r-rave, dah-ling! Hevving watches over your Alonzo!'

"Not so. A big brawny brute in spurs comes in the dark to stir us with the toe of his boot. 'Silence,' he hisses, 'if you can't hear that damn reveille, I'll punch you in the snoot, an' then mebber

you'll spread them lop-ears o' yourn!

"Heaven! Your Alonzo is derided by a hireling!

"Pack up, you swallow-tailed, leather-seated, pig-prodding sons of galoots!" Thus, our first sergeant, recently of the regulars, roll-call having ended.

"Coffeeless, soupless, tackless, we leer furtively at the two days' rations in our haversacks which we dare not sample; lick our chops reflectively, are cruelly chidden by underlings in uniform, further insulted by other underlings, are stepped on, crowded, bitten, and kicked at by our faithful Arab steeds, are coarsely huddled into line, where officers come to gloat over us and think out further ingenious indignities to heap upon us while we stand to horse. And we stand there two hours!

"I can't keep up this artificial flow of low comedy. The plain fact of the situation is that we're being hustled toward an amphibious thing with paddle-wheels named The Skylark, and I haven't said good-bye to you.

"Ailsa, it isn't likely that anything is going to knock my head off or puncture vital sections of me. But in case the ludicrous should happen, I want you to know that a cleaner man goes before the last

Court Marshal than would have stood trial there before he met you.

"You are every inch my ideal of a woman--every fibre in you is utterly feminine. I adore your acquired courage, I worship your heavenly inconsistencies. The mental pleasure I experienced with you was measured and limited only by my own perversity and morbid self-absorption; the splendour of the passion I divine in you, unawakened, awes me, leaves me in wonder. The spiritual tonic, even against my own sickly will has freshened me by mere contact with the world you live in; the touch of your lips and hands--ah, Ailsa--has taught me at last the language that I sneered at.

"Well--we can never marry. How it will be with us, how end, He who, after all is said and done, did construct us, knows now. And we will know some day, when life is burned out in us.

"Hours, days of bitter revolt come--the old madness for you, the old recklessness of desire, the savage impatience with life, assail me still. Because, Ailsa, I would--I could have made you a--well, an interesting husband, anyway. You were fashioned to be the divinest wife and . . . I'm not going on in this strain; I'll write you when I can. And for God's sake take care of your life. There's nothing left if you go--nothing.

"I've made a will. Trooper Burgess, a comrade--my former valet--carries a duplicate memorandum. Don't weep; I'll live to

make another. But in this one I have written you that my mother's letters and pictures are to be yours--when I have a chance I'll draw it in legal form. And, dear, first be perfectly sure I'm dead, and then destroy my mother's letters without reading them; and then look upon her face. And I think you will forgive me when I tell you that it is for her sake that I can never marry. But you will not understand why."

Over this letter Ailsa had little time to wonder or to make herself wretched, for that week orders came to evacuate the Farm Hospital and send all sick and wounded to the General Hospital at Alexandria.

A telegram arrived, too, from Miss Dix, who was authorised to detail nurses by the Secretary of War, ordering the two nurses of Sainte Ursula's Sisterhood to await letters of recommendation and written assignments to another hospital to be established farther south. But where that hospital was to be built nobody seemed to know.

A week later a dozen Protestant women nurses arrived at Alexandria, where they were made unwelcome. Medical directors, surgeons, ward masters objected, bluntly declaring that they wouldn't endure a lot of women interfering and fussing and writing hysterical nonsense to the home newspapers.

For a while confusion reigned, intensified by the stupendous

mobilisation going on all around.

A medical officer came to the Farm Hospital and angrily informed Ailsa that the staff had had enough of women in the wards; and from forty cots forty half-dead, ghastly creatures partly rose and cursed the medical gentleman till his ears burned crimson,

Ailsa, in her thin gray habit bearing the scarlet heart, stood in the middle of the ward and defied him with her credentials.

"The medical staff of the army has only to lay its case before the Secretary of War," she said, looking calmly at him, "and that is where the Sanitary Commission obtains its authority. Meanwhile our orders detail us here for duty."

"We'll see about that!" he snapped, backing away.

"So will we," said Ailsa, smiling. But that afternoon she and Letty took an ambulance and went, in great distress of mind, to see Mother Angela, Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who had arrived from Indiana ready to continue hospital duties on the Potomac if necessary.

The lovely Superieure, a lady of rare culture and ability, took Ailsa's hand in hers with a sad smile.

"Men's prejudices are hard to meet. The social structure of the world is built on them. But men's prejudices vanish when those same men fall sick. The War Department has regularised our position; it will authorise yours. You need not be afraid."

She smiled again reminiscently.

"When our Sisters of the Holy Cross first appeared in the wards, the patients themselves looked at us sullenly and askance. I heard one say: 'Why can't they take off those white-winged sun-bonnets in the wards?' And another sneered: 'Sun-bonnets! Huh! They look like busted white parasols!' But, Mrs. Paige, our white 'sun-bonnets' have already become to them the symbol they love most, after the flag. Be of good courage. Your silver-gray garb and white cuffs will mean much to our soldiers before this battle year is ended."

That evening Ailsa and Letty drove back to the Parm Hospital in their ambulance, old black Cassius managing his mules with alternate bursts of abuse and of praise. First he would beat upon his mules with a flat stick which didn't hurt, but made a loud racket; then, satisfied, he would loll in his seat singing in melodious and interminable recitative:

An' I hope to gain de prommis' lan',

Yaas I do,

'Deed I do.

Lor' I hope to gain de prommis' lan',

Dat I do,

An' dar I'll flap ma wings an' take ma stan',

Yaas I will,

'Deed I will,

An' I'll tune ma harp an' jine de Shinin' Ban'

Glory, Glory,

I hope to gain de prommis' lan'!

And over and over the same shouted melody, interrupted only by an outburst of reproach for his mules.

They drove back through a road which had become for miles only a great muddy lane running between military encampments, halted at every bridge and crossroads to exhibit their passes; they passed never-ending trains of army waggons cither stalled or rumbling slowly toward Alexandria. Everywhere were soldiers, drilling, marching, cutting wood, washing clothes, cooking, cleaning arms, mending, working on camp ditches, drains, or forts, writing letters at the edge of shelter tents, digging graves, skylarking--everywhere the earth was covered with them.

They passed the camp for new recruits, where the poor "fresh fish"

awaited orders to join regiments in the field to which they had been assigned; they passed the camp for stragglers and captured deserters; the camp for paroled prisoners; the evil-smelling convalescent camp, which, still under Surgeon General Hammond's Department, had not yet been inspected by the Sanitary Commission.

An officer, riding their way, talked with them about conditions in this camp, where, he said, the convalescents slept on the bare ground, rain or shine; where there were but three surgeons for the thousands suffering from intestinal and throat and lung troubles, destitute, squalid, unwarmed by fires, unwashed, wretched, forsaken by the government that called them to its standard.

It was the first of that sort of thing that Ailsa and Letty had seen.

After the battles in the West--particularly after the fall of Fort Donnelson--terrible rumours were current in the Army of the Potomac and in the hospitals concerning the plight of the wounded--of new regiments that had been sent into action with not a single medical officer, or, for that matter, an ounce of medicine, or of lint in its chests.

They were grisly rumours. In the neat wards of the Farm Hospital, with its freshly swept and sprinkled floors, its cots in rows, its detailed soldier nurses and the two nurses from Sainte Ursula's

Sisterhood, its sick-diet department, its medical stores, its two excellent surgeons, these rumours found little credence.

And now, here in the vicinity, Ailsa's delicate nostrils shrank from the stench arising from the "Four Camps"; and she saw the emaciated forms lining the hillside, and she heard the horrible and continuous coughing.

"Do you know," she said to Letty the next morning, "I am going to write to Miss Dix and inform her of conditions in that camp."

And she did so, perfectly conscious that she was probably earning the dislike of the entire medical department. But hundreds of letters like hers had already been sent to Washington, and already the Sanitary Commission was preparing to take hold; so, when at length one morning an acknowledgment of her letter was received, no notice was taken of her offer to volunteer for service in that loathsome camp, but the same mail brought orders and credentials and transportation vouchers for herself and Letty.

Letty was still asleep, but Ailsa went up and waked her when the hour for her tour of duty approached.

"What do you think!" she said excitedly. "We are to pack up our valises and go aboard the Mary Lane to-morrow. She sails with

hospital stores. _What_ do you think of that?"

"Where are we going?" asked Letty, bewildered.

"You poor, sleepy little thing," said Ailsa, sitting down on the bed's shaky edge, "I'm sure I don't know where we're going, dear. Two Protestant nurses are coming here to superintend the removal of our sick boys--and Dr. West says they are old and ugly, and that Miss Dix won't have any more nurses who are not over thirty and who are not _most_ unattractive to look at."

"I wonder what Miss Dix would do if she saw us," said Letty naively, and sat up in bed; rubbing her velvety eyes with the backs of her hands. Then she yawned, looked inquiringly at Ailsa, smiled, and swung her slender body out of bed.

While she was doing her hair Ailsa heard her singing to herself. She was very happy; another letter from Dr. Benton had arrived.

Celia, who had gone to Washington three days before, to see Mr. Stanton, returned that evening with her passes and order for transportation; and to Ailsa's astonishment and delight she found that the designated boat was the _Mary Lane_.

But Celia was almost too nervous and too tired to talk over the

prospects.

"My dear," she said wearily, "that drive from the Chain Bridge to Alexandria has mos'ly killed me. I vow and declare there was never one moment when one wheel was not in a mud hole. All my bones ache, Honey-bud, and I'm cross with talking to so many Yankees, and--do you believe me!--that ve'y horrid Stanton creature gave orders that I was to take the oath!"

"The--oath?" asked Ailsa, amazed.

"Certainly. And I took it," she added fiercely, "becose of my husband! If it had not been fo' Curt I'd have told Mr. Stanton what I thought of his old oath!"

"What kind of an oath was it, Celia?"

Celia repeated it haughtily:

"I do solemnly swear, in the presence of Almighty God, to faithfully support the Constitution of the United States, and of the State of New York. So he'p me God."

"It is the oath of fealty," said Ailsa in a hushed voice.

"It was not necessary," said Celia coldly. "My husband is sufficient to keep me--harmless. . . . But I know what I feel in my heart, Honey-bud; and so does every Southern woman--God help us all. . . . Is that little Miss Lynden going with us?"

"Letty? Yes, of course."

Celia began to undress. "She's a very sweet little minx. . . . She is--odd, somehow. . . . So young--such a helpless, cute little thing. . . . Ailsa, in that child's eyes--or in her features somewhere, somehow, I see--I feel a--a sadness, somehow--like the gravity of experience, the something that wisdom brings to the very young too early. It is odd, isn't it."

"Letty is a strange, gentle little thing. I've often wondered----"

"What, Honey-bee?"

"I--don't know," said Ailsa vaguely. "It is not natural that a happy woman should be so solemnly affectionate to another. I've often thought that she must, sometime or other, have known deep unhappiness."

When Celia was ready to retire, Ailsa bade her good-night and wandered away down the stairs, Letty was still on duty; she glanced into the sick-diet kitchen as she passed and saw the girl bending over a stew-pan.

She did not disturb her. With evening a soft melancholy had begun to settle over Ailsa. It came in the evening, now, often--a sensation not entirely sad, not unwelcome, soothing her, composing her mind for serious thought, for the sweet sadness of memory.

Always she walked, now, companioned by memories of Berkley. Wherever she moved--in the quiet of the sick wards, in the silence of the moonlight, seated by smeared windows watching the beating rain, in the dead house, on duty in the kitchen contriving broths, or stretched among her pillows, always the memories came in troops to bear her company.

They were with her now as she paced the veranda to and fro, to and fro.

She heard Letty singing happily over her stew-pan in the kitchen; the stir and breathing of the vast army was audible all around her in the darkness. Presently she looked at her watch in the moonlight, returned it to her breast.

"I'm ready, dear," she said, going to the kitchen door.

And another night on duty was begun--the last she ever was to spend under the quiet roof of the Farm Hospital.

That night she sat beside the bed of a middle-aged man, a corporal in a Minnesota regiment whose eyes had been shot out on picket. Otherwise he was convalescent from dysentery. But Ailsa had seen the convalescent camp, and she would not let him go yet.

So she read to him in a low, soothing voice, glancing from time to time at the bandaged face. And, when she saw he was asleep, she sat silent, hands nervously clasped above the Bible on her knee. Then her lids closed for an instant as she recited a prayer for the man she loved, wherever he might be that moon-lit night.

A zouave, terribly wounded on Roanoke Island, began to fret; she rose and walked swiftly to him, and the big sunken eyes opened and he said, humbly:

"I am sorry to inconvenience you, Mrs. Paige. I'll try to keep quiet."

"You foolish fellow, you don't inconvenience me. What can I do for you?"

His gaze was wistful, but he said nothing, and she bent down tenderly, repeating her question.

A slight flush gathered under his gaunt cheek bones. "I guess I'm just contrary," he muttered. "Don't bother about me, ma'am."

"You are thinking of your wife; talk to me about her, Neil."

It was what he wanted; he could endure the bandages. So, her cool smooth hand resting lightly over his, where it lay on the sheets, she listened to the home-sick man until it was time to give another sufferer his swallow of lemonade.

Later she put on a gingham overgown, sprinkled it and her hands with camphor, and went into the outer wards where the isolated patients lay--where hospital gangrene and erysipelas were the horrors. And, farther on, she entered the outlying wing devoted to typhus. In spite of the open windows the atmosphere was heavy; everywhere the air seemed weighted with the odour of decay.

As always, in spite of herself, she hesitated at the door. But the steward on duty rose; and she took his candle and entered the place of death.

Toward morning a Rhode Island artilleryman, dying in great pain, relapsed into coma. Waiting beside him, she wrote to his parents, enclosing the little keepsakes he had designated when conscious, while his life flickered with the flickering candle. Her letter and his life ended together; dawn made the candle-light ghastly; a few moments later the rumble of the dead waggon sounded in the court below. The driver came early because there was a good deal of freight for his waggon that day. A few moments afterward the detail arrived with the stretchers, and Ailsa stood up, drew aside the screen, and went down into the gray obscurity of the court-yard.

Grave-diggers were at work on a near hillside; she could hear the clink clink of spade and pick; reveille was sounding from hill to hill; the muffled stirring became a dull, sustained clatter, never ceasing around her for one instant.

A laundress was boiling clothing over a fire near by; Ailsa slipped off her gingham overdress, unbound the white turban, and tossed them on the grass near the fire. Then, rolling back her sleeves, she plunged her arms into a basin of hot water in which a little powdered camphor was floating.

While busy with her ablutions the two new nurses arrived, seated on a battery limber; and, hastily drying her hands, she went to them and welcomed them, gave them tea and breakfast in Dr. West's

office, and left them there while she went away to awake Celia and Letty, pack her valise for the voyage before her, and write to Berkley.

But it was not until she saw the sun low in the west from the deck of the Mary Lane, that she at last found a moment to write.

The place, the hour, her loneliness, moved depths in her that she had never sounded--moved her to a recklessness never dreamed of. It was an effort for her to restrain the passionate confessions trembling on her pen's tip; her lips whitened with the cry struggling for utterance.

"Dear, never before did I so completely know myself, never so absolutely trust myself to the imperious, almost ungovernable tide which has taken my destiny from the quiet harbour where it lay, and which is driving it headlong toward yours.

"You have left me alone, to wonder and to wonder. And while isolated, I stand trying to comprehend why it was that your words separated our destinies while your arms around me made them one. I am perfectly aware that the surge of life has caught me up, tossed me to its crest, and is driving me blindly out across the waste spaces of the world toward you--wherever you may be--whatever be the cost. I will not live without you.

"I am not yet quite sure what has so utterly changed me--what has so completely changed within me. But I am changed. Perhaps daily familiarity with death and pain and wretchedness, hourly contact with the paramount mystery of all, has broadened me, or benumbed me. I don't know. All I seem to see clearly--to clearly understand--is the dreadful brevity of life, the awful chances against living, the miracle of love in such a maelstrom, the insanity of one who dare not confess it, live for it, love to the uttermost with heart, soul, and body, while life endures,

"All my instincts, all principles inherent or inculcated; all knowledge spiritual and intellectual, acquired; all precepts, maxims, proverbs, axioms incorporated and lately a part of me, seem trivial, empty, meaningless in sound and in form compared to the plain truths of Death. For never until now did I understand that we walk always arm in arm with Death, that he squires us at every step, coolly joggles our elbow, touches our shoulder now and then, wakes us at dawn, puts out our night-light, and smooths the sheets we sleep under.

"I had thought of Death as something hiding very, very far away. Yet I had already seen him enter my own house. But now I understand how close he always is; and, somehow, it has changed--hardened, maybe--much that was vague and unformed in my character. And, maybe, the knowledge is distorting it; I don't know. All I know is that, before life ends, if there is a chance

of fulfilment, I will take it. And fulfilment means you--my love
for you, the giving of it, of myself, of all I am, all I desire,
all I care for, all I believe, into your keeping--into your
embrace. That, for me, is fulfilment of life.

"Even in your arms you tell me that there is to be no fulfilment.
I have acquiesced, wondering, bewildered, confused. But, dear, you
can never tell me so again--if we live--if I live to look into your
eyes again--never, never. For I shall not believe it, nor shall I
let you believe it, if only we can win through this deathly battle
nightmare which is rising between us--if ever we can find each
other again, touch each other through this red, unreal glare of war.

"Oh, Philip--Philip--only to have your arms around me! Only to
touch you! You shall not tell me then that our destinies do not
mingle. They shall mingle like two wines; they shall become
utterly confused in one another; I was meant for that; I will not
die, isolated by you, unknown to you, not belonging to you! I will
not die alone this way in the world, with no deeper memory to take
into the unknown than that you said you loved me.

"God alone knows what change misery and sorrow and love and death
have accomplished in me; never have I stood so alone upon this
earth; never have I cared so for life, never have I so desired to
be a deathless part of yours.

"If you love me you will make me part of yours--somehow, some way.

And, Philip, if there is no way, yet there is always one way if we both live. And I shall not complain--only, I cannot die--let life go out--so that you could ever forget that my life had been part of yours.

"Is it dreadful of me to think this? But the mighty domination of Death has dwarfed everything around me, dear; shrivelled the little man-made formulas and laws; the living mind and body seem more vital than the by-laws made to govern them. . . . God knows what I'm writing, but you have gone into battle leaving life unfulfilled for us both, and I assented--and my heart and soul are crying out to you, unreconciled--crying out my need of you across the smoke. . . .

"There is a battery at Cock-pit Point, firing, and the smoke of the guns drifts across the low-hanging sun. It must be only a salute, for our fleet of transports moves on, torrents of black smoke pouring out of every tall funnel, paddle-wheels churning steadily.

"When the fleet passed Mount Vernon the bells tolled aboard every boat; and we could see the green trees and a glimmer of white on shore, and the flag flying.

"What sadness! A people divided who both honour the sacredness of

this spot made holy by a just man's grave--gathering to meet in
battle--brother against brother.

"But Fate shall not longer array you and me against each other! I
will not have it so! Neither my heart nor my soul could endure the
cruelty of it, nor my reason its wickedness and insanity. From the
first instant I met your eyes, Philip, somehow, within me, I knew I
belonged to you. I do more hopelessly to-day than ever--and with
each day, each hour, more and more until I die. You will not let
me go to my end unclaimed, will you?--a poor ghost all alone, lost
in the darkness somewhere among the stars--lacking that tie between
you and it which even death does not know how to sever!

"I leave all to you, loving you, wishing what you wish, content
with what you give--and take--so that you do give and take and keep
and hold for life.

"It is very dusky; the lights, red and white, glimmer on every
transport. We feel the sea-swell a little. Celia left us, going
ashore at Acquia Creek. She takes the cars to Richmond and then to
Paigecourt. Letty sits beside me on deck. There were two cases of
fever aboard and we went down into a dreadfully ill-smelling cabin
to do what we could. Now we are here on deck again. Some officers
are talking very gaily with Letty. I am ending my letter to
you--wherever you are, my darling, under these big, staring stars
that look down at me out of space. I don't want my ghost to be

blown about up there--unless it belongs to you. That is the only fear of death I ever have or ever had--that I might die before you had all of me there is to give."

CHAPTER XV

Toward the end of June, as Claymore's new provisional brigade of Sykes's division, Fitz John Porter's superb corps d'armee, neared the designated rendezvous, some particularly dirty veteran regiments, bivouacked along the fields, crowded to the roadside, fairly writhing in their scorn and derision.

"Fresh fish! Oh--h! Fresh fi--sh!" they shouted. "My God, boys, just see them pretty red pants! Mother! Come and look. Oh, papa, what are they? Sa--ay, would you gentlemen kindly tell us poor old sodgers what kind ov a hell ov a, dressmaker cut out them pantalettes? I wish I could go out to play with these nice, perlite little boys? Oh, children! why _didn't_ you bring your nursemaids with you?"

The 3rd Zouaves marched past the jeering veterans, grinding their teeth, but making no effort at retort. They knew well enough by this time that any attempt to retort would be worse than useless.

As the head of the column of the 8th Lancers appeared from the West

at the forks of the other road, the dingy veterans fairly danced in malicious delight:

"Excuse us," they simpered, kissing their dirty finger-tips to the horsemen, "_ex_-cuse us, please, but do tell us how you left dear old Fift' Avenoo. Them rocking hosses need a leettle new paint where they sit down, me lords. Hey, you ain't got any old red silk stockings we can use for guidons, have you? Oh, Alonzo darling! curl my hair an' wet me with expensive cologne!"

Colonel Egerton's 20th Dragoons, being in blue and orange, got off easier, though the freshness of their uniforms was tremendously resented; but McDunn's 10th Flying Battery, in brand new uniforms, ran the full fierce fire of chaff; the indignant cannoneers were begged to disclose the name of the stage line which had supplied their battery horses; and Arthur Wye, driving the showy swing team of No. 6, Left Section, shouted back in his penetrating voice:

"If you want to know who sells broken-down nags to suckers, it's Simon Cameron!--you Dutch-faced, barrel-bellied, Pennsylvania scuts!"

A bull-like bellow of laughter burst from the battery; even Captain McDunn's grin neutralised the scowling visage he turned to conceal it. And the fury of the Pennsylvanians knew no bounds; for, from general to drummer boy, the troops of that great State were

horribly sensitive to any comment on the Hon. Mr. Cameron's horse transactions.

Warren's matchless brigade followed; but the 6th Lancers had seen service and they were not jeered; nor were the 5th and 10th Zouaves, the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery and the Rhode Island Battery.

Berkley, riding with his troop, bridle loose in both gauntleted hands, lance swinging wide from stirrup and elbow loop, looked to the left and noticed Warren's regiments swinging out across the breezy uplands. Half an hour later he saw the 3rd Zouaves enter a wheat field to the left of the road, form on their colour front, unslung knapsacks, and stack arms. McDunn's battery found a gap in the fence and followed, the guns bumping and bouncing out over a potato field; and presently Egerton's Dragoons turned sharply to the right and entered a cool road that ran along a bushy hollow.

The 8th Lancers kept straight on for five or six hundred yards, until they encountered their regimental quartermaster and camping party. Then they wheeled to the right, passed through a thin belt of shade trees, across a splendid marl drive and a vast unkempt lawn. Beyond this they skirted a typical planter's house of the better class, with its white galleries, green blinds, quarters, smoke houses, barns, and outhouses innumerable; and halted, each troop moving to a point a little in the rear of where its horses

were to be secured, and forming one rank. The bugles sounded "Dismount!" Eight hundred sun-burned riders set foot to sod, details were made to hold the horses, lances were stacked, picket ropes fixed, shelter tents erected, sabre and bridle hung on the twelve weapons of the troop-carbineers, and the standard carried to Colonel Arran's tent.

Directly to the right was a gentle declivity with a clear, rapid stream splashing the bottom grasses. Beyond the stream a low green hill rose, concealing the landscape and the river beyond.

And here, on the breezy meadow slope, Egerton's Dragoons went into camp and sent out their fatigue parties and grand guards.

Company and squadron streets were laid out, sinks dug, shelter tents pitched, firewood brought, horses picketed. Twenty paces in front of each pile of tents the kitchens were established; all the regimental cavalry waggons came up promptly and were parked in the rear of the picket line for sick horses; the belated and hated sutler of the 8th Lancers drove hastily in, deaf to the blandishments of veterans along the roadside, who eyed him malevolently and with every desire to work him substantial harm.

Late in the afternoon there was much visiting along the lines and between distant camps; the day was cloudless and perfect; magnolia and china-berry scented the winds which furrowed every grassy

hillside; flags fluttered, breezy gusts of bugle music incited the birds to rivalry. Peace and sunshine lay over all, and there was nothing sinister to offend save, far along the horizon, the low, unbroken monotone of cannon, never louder, never lower, steady, dull, interminable; and on the southern horizon a single tall cloud, slanting a trifle to the east, like a silver pillar out of plumb.

Berkley's attention was directed to it by a suspicious comrade; they both gazed at it curiously, listening to the low mutter of the cannonade; then Berkley frowned, folded both gauntlets, placed them in his belt, passed his hand over his freshly shaven chin, and, pocketing his cob pipe, sauntered forth to visit and gossip with those he knew in other camps.

"Hello, Burgess," he said humorously; "how are you making out?"

His late valet's arm twitched instinctively toward the salute he dared not offer; he glanced stealthily right and left before answering:

"I am doing very well, sir, thank you."

"I told you to cut out the 'sir,' didn't I?"

"Yes, sir--beg pardon----"

Berkley eyed him. "You've got your chance," he said. "Your rank and mine are equal. Do you take pleasure in continually reminding yourself of your recent position of servitude?"

"Sir?--beg pardon----"

"Can't you help it? Is it born in you?"

Burgess stood silent, considering, then he lifted his ugly face and looked hard at Berkley.

"I am not ashamed of having served you. I am more comfortable under orders. . . . I liked to dress you up . . . I wish to God it was that way now."

"Don't you want your independence?"

"My independence," repeated Burgess, "I had it--more of it when I was looking out for you, sir, than I have now in this damn regiment----"

"Well, what did you enlist for?"

"You've asked me that many times, sir, and I don't know. . . . I'd rather be around, handy like----"

"You'll get killed some day, don't you know it?"

"No, sir. I guess you'll look out for me. You always did."

"How the devil can I prevent one of those big shells from knocking you off your horse!"

Burgess, patient, undisturbed, let the question go with a slight smile.

"What a jackass you are!" said Berkley irritably; "here's a dollar to get some pie. And if you can cheat that cursed sutler, do it!"

He himself purchased two big pies from the sutler after an angry hagggle in which he was easily worsted; and he munched away contentedly as he walked toward the lines of the 3rd Zouaves, his spurs and sabre jingling, Burgess following respectfully at heel.

"Hello, Steve!" he called out to a sun-burnt young zouave who was

drying his freshly washed turban in the hill breeze. "I always heard you fellows wore infant's underclothes, but I never believed it before!"

"That's my turban, you idiot!" retorted Stephen, turning red as several of McDunn's artillerymen began to laugh. But he came over and shook hands and accepted a big piece of pie without further resentment. "Hello, Burgess," he added.

"How do you do, sir."

"That damned Dutch sutler of ours," commented Berkley, "puts clay in his pie-erust. We'll certainly have to fix him before long. How are you, Steve, anyway?"

"Both socks full of tallow; otherwise I'm feeling fine," said the boy. "Did you hear those dirty Bucktail veterans back there poking fun at us? Well, we never answer 'em nowadays; but the Zouaves are getting fearfully sick of it; and if we don't go into battle pretty soon there'll be a private war on--" he winked--"with those Pennsylvanians, you bet. And I guess the Lancers will be in it, too."

Berkley cast an evil eye on a pair of Pennsylvania soldiers who had come to see how the Zou-zous made camp; then he shrugged his

shoulders, watching Burgess, who had started away to roam hungrily around the sutler's camp again.

"After all," he said, "these veterans have a right to jeer at us. They've seen war; and now they know whether they'll fight or run away. It's more than we know, so far."

"Well, I tell you," said Stephen candidly, "there's no chance of my running away. A fellow can't skedaddle when his father's looking at him. Besides, Phil, I don't know how it is, but I'm not very much afraid, not as much as I thought I'd be."

Berkley looked at him curiously. "Have you been much under fire?"

"Only that affair at the Blue Bridge--you know yourself how it was. After the first shell had made me rather sick at my stomach I was all right--except that I hated to see father sitting up there on his horse while we were all lying snug in the wheat. . . . How did you feel when the big shells came over?"

"Bad," said Berkley briefly.

"Sick?"

"Worse."

"I don't see why you should feel queer, Phil--after that bully thing you did with the escort----"

"Oh, hell!" cut in Berkley savagely, "I'm sick of hearing about it. If you all knew that I was too scared to realise what I was doing you'd let up on that episode."

Stephen laughed. "I hope our boys get scared in the same way. . . . Hello, here's a friend of yours I believe----"

They turned to encounter Casson, the big dragoon, arm in arm with the artilleryman, Arthur Wye.

"Give us some pie, you son of a gun!" they suggested unceremoniously; and when supplied and munching, they all locked arms and strolled out across the grass toward the hill, where already, dark against the blinding blue, hundreds of idle soldiers had gathered to sit on the turf and stare at the tall cloud on the horizon, or watch the signal officer on the higher hill beyond, seated at his telescope, while, beside him, a soldier swung dirty square flags in the wind,

As they arrived on the crest a quick exclamation escaped them; for

there, beyond, mile on mile, lay the armed host of which their regiments were tiny portions.

"Lord!" said Stephen in a low, surprised voice, "did you fellows know that the whole army was near here?"

"Not I," said Berkley, gazing spellbound out across the rolling panorama of river, swamp, woods, and fields. "I don't believe it occurs very often, either--the chance to see an entire army all at once, encamped right at your feet. What a lot of people and animals!"

They sat down, cross-legged, enjoying their pie, eyes wandering wonderingly over the magic landscape. Here and there a marquee marked some general's headquarters, but except for these there were no tents save shelter tents in sight, and not so many of these, because many divisions had bivouacked, and others were in cantonments where the white cupola of some house glimmered, or the thin spire of a church pierced green trees.

Here and there they noted and pointed out to each other roads over which cavalry moved or long waggon trains crept. Down along the swamps that edged the river they could see soldiers building corduroy, repairing bridges, digging ditches, and, in one spot, erecting a fort.

"Oh, hell," said Casson, whose regiment, dismounted, had served muddy apprenticeship along the York River, "if they're going to begin that kind of thing again I'd rather be at home laying gas pipes on Broadway!"

"What kind of thing?" demanded Stephen.

"That road making, swamp digging--all that fixing up forts for big guns that nobody has a chance to fire because the Johnnies get out just when everything's ready to blow 'em into the Union again. A--h!" he added in disgust, "didn't we have a dose of that at Yorktown and Williamsburg? Why doesn't Little Mac start us hell-bent for Richmond and let us catch 'em on the jump?"

For a while, their mouths full of pie, the soldiers, with the exception of Berkley, criticised their commander-in-chief, freely--their corps commanders, and every officer down to their particular corporals. That lasted for ten minutes. Then one and all began comparing these same maligned officers most favourably with other officers of other corps; and they ended, as usual, by endorsing their commander-in-chief with enthusiasm, and by praising every officer under whom they served.

Then they boasted of their individual regiments--all except Berkley--extolling their discipline, their marching, their foraging

efficiency, their martyr-like endurance.

"What's your Colonel like, anyway?" inquired Casson, turning to Berkley.

"He's a good officer," said the latter indifferently.

"Do you like him?"

"He has--merit."

"Jerusalem!" laughed Wye, "if that isn't a kick in the seat of his pants!"

Berkley reddened. "You're mistaken, Arthur."

"Didn't you tell me at Alexandria that you hated him?"

"I said that--yes. I was disappointed because the Westchester Horse was not attached to John Casson's regiment. . . . I don't--dislike Colonel Arran."

Berkley was still red; he lay in the grass on his stomach, watching

the big cloud pile on the horizon.

"You know," said Casson, "that part of our army stretches as far as that smoke. We're the rear-guard."

"Listen to the guns," said Wye, pretending technical familiarity even at that distance. "They're big fellows--those Dahlgrens and Columbiads----"

"Oh, bosh!" snapped Casson, "you can't tell a howitzer from a rocket!"

Wye sat up, thoroughly offended. "To prove your dense ignorance, you yellow-bellied dragoon, let me ask you a simple question: When a shell is fired toward you can you see it coming?"

"Certainly. Didn't we see the big shells at Yorktown----"

"Wait! When a solid shot is fired, can you see it when it is coming toward you?"

"Certainly----"

"No you can't, you ignoramus! You can see a shell coming or going;

you can see a solid shot going--never coming from the enemy's guns.

Aw! go soak that bull head of yours and wear a lady-like havelock!"

The bickering discussion became general for a moment, then, still disputing, Casson and Wye walked off toward camp, and Stephen and Berkley followed.

"Have you heard from your mother?" asked the latter, as they sauntered along over the grass.

"Yes, twice. Father was worried half to death because she hadn't yet left Paigecourt. Isn't it strange, Phil, that after all we're so near mother's old home? And father was all against her going, I tell you, I'm worried."

"She has probably gone by this time," observed Berkley.

The boy nodded doubtfully; then: "I had a fine letter from Ailsa. She sent me twenty dollars," he added naively, "but our sutler has got it all."

"What did Ailsa say?" asked Berkley casually.

"Oh, she enquired about father and me--and you, too, I believe.

Oh, yes; she wanted me to say to you that she was well---and so is that other girl--what's her name?"

"Letty Lynden?"

"Oh, yes--Letty Lynden. They're in a horrible kind of a temporary hospital down on the York River along with the Sisters of Charity; and she said she had just received orders to pack up and start west with the ambulances."

"West?"

"I believe so."

After a silence Berkley said:

"I heard from her yesterday."

"You did!"

"Yes. Unless your father already knows, it might be well to say to him that Ailsa's ambulance train is ordered to rendezvous in the rear of the 5th Provisional Corps head-quarters."

"Our corps!"

"That looks like it, doesn't it? The 5th Provisional Corps is Porter's." He turned and looked back, out across the country.

"She may be somewhere out yonder, at this very moment, Steve." He made a vague gesture toward the west, stood looking for a while, then turned and walked slowly on with head lowered.

"I wish my mother and Ailsa were back in New York," said the boy fretfully. "I don't see why the whole family should get into hot water at the same time."

"It wouldn't surprise me very much if Ailsa's ambulance landed beside your mother's door at Paigecourt," said Berkley. "The head-quarters of the 5th Corps cannot be very far from Paigecourt." At the cavalry lines he offered his hand to Stephen in farewell.

"Good-bye," said the boy. "I wish you the luck of the 6th Lancers. Since Hanover Court-House nobody calls 'em 'fresh fish'--just because they charged a few Johnnies with the lance and took a few prisoners and lost thirty horses."

Berkley laughed. "Thanks; and I wish you the luck of the 5th

Zouaves. They're into everything, I hear, particularly hen-coops and pigpens. Casson says they live high in the 5th Zouaves. . . Good-bye, old fellow . . . will you remember me to your father?"

"I will when he lets me talk to him," grinned Stephen. "We're a disciplined regiment--I found that out right away--and there's nothing soft for me to expect just because my father is colonel and Josiah Lent happens to be major."

The regimental bands played the next day; the distant cannonade had ceased; sunshine fell from a cloudless sky, and the army watched a military balloon, the "Intrepid," high glistening above the river, its cables trailing in gracious curves earthward.

Porter's 5th Corps now formed the rear-guard of the army; entire regiments went on picket, even the two regiments of Lancers took their turn, though not armed for that duty. During the day there had been some unusually brisk firing along the river, near enough to cause regiments that had never been under fire to prick up a thousand pairs of ears and listen. As the day lengthened toward evening, picket firing became incessant, and the occasional solid report of a cannon from the shore opposite disclosed the presence of Confederate batteries, the nearness of which surprised many an untried soldier.

Toward sundown Berkley saw a business-like cavalry officer ride

into camp with an escort of the 5th Regulars. Men around him said that the officer was General Philip St. George Cooke, and that the chances were that the regiments of the reserve were going into action pretty soon.

About 3 o'clock the next morning boots and saddles sounded from the head-quarters of the Cavalry Reserve brigade and the 5th and 6th United States Cavalry, followed by Colonel Rush's Lancers, rode out of their camp grounds and were presently followed by the 1st United States and a squadron of Pennsylvania carbineers.

The troopers of the 8th Lancers watched them ride away in the dawn; but no orders came to follow them, and, discontented, muttering, they went sullenly about their duties, wondering why they, also, had not been called on.

That nobody had caught the great Confederate cavalryman did not console them; they had to listen to the jeers of the infantry, blaming them for Stuart's great raid around the entire Union army; in sickening reiteration came the question: "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" And, besides, one morning in a road near camp, some of the 8th Lancers heard comments from a group of general officers which were not at all flattering to their own cavalry.

"You see," said a burly colonel of engineers, "that this army doesn't know what real cavalry looks like--except when it gets a

glimpse of Jeb Stuart's command."

An infantry colonel coincided with him, profanely:

"That damned rebel cavalry chases ours with a regularity and persistence that makes me ill. Did the world ever see the like of it? You send out one of our mounted regiments to look for a mounted rebel regiment, and the moment it finds what it's lookin' for the rebs give a pleased sort of yell, and ours turn tail.

Because it's become a habit: that's why our cavalry runs! And then the fun begins! Lord God Almighty! what's the matter with our cavalry?"

"You can't make cavalry in a few months," observed a colonel of heavy artillery, stretching his fat, scarlet-striped legs in his stirrups. "What do you expect? Every man, woman, and child south of Mason and Dixon's Line knows how to ride. The Southerners are born horsemen. We in the North are not. That's the difference. We've got to learn to be. Take a raw soldier and send him forth mounted on an animal with which he has only a most formal acquaintance, and his terrors are increased twofold. When you give him a sabre, pistol, and carbine, to take care of when he has all he can do to take care of himself, those terrors increase in proportion. _Then_ show him the enemy and send him into battle--and what is the result? Skedaddle!

"Don't make any mistake; we haven't any cavalry yet. Some day we will, when our men learn to ride faster than a walk."

"God!" muttered a brigadier-general under his white moustache; "it's been a bitter pill to swallow--this raid around our entire army by fifteen hundred of Jeb Stuart's riders and two iron guns!"

The half dozen lancers, lying on their bellies in the grass on the bank above the road where this discussion took place remained crimson, mute, paralysed with mortification. Was that what the army thought of them?

But they had little time for nursing their mortification that morning; the firing along the river was breaking out in patches with a viciousness and volume heretofore unheard; and a six-gun Confederate field battery had joined in, arousing the entire camp of Claymore's brigade. Louder and louder grew the uproar along the river; smoke rose and took silvery-edged shape in the sunshine; bugles were calling to the colours regiments encamped on the right; a light battery trotted out across a distant meadow, unlimbered and went smartly into action.

About noon the bugles summoned the 3rd Zouaves. As they were forming, the camps of the 8th Lancers and the 10th Light Battery rang with bugle music. Berkley, standing to horse, saw the Zouaves

leaving the hill at a jog-trot, their red legs twinkling; but half way down the slope they were halted to dress ranks; and the Lancers, cantering ahead, turned westward and moved off along the edge of the river swamp toward the piled-up cloud of smoke down stream.

After them trotted the 10th New York Flying Battery as though on parade, their guidons standing straight out behind the red-and-white guidons of the Lancers.

The Zouaves had now reached wet land, where a staff officer met Colonel Craig and piloted him through a field of brush and wild grass, and under the parapets of an emplacement for big guns, on which men were nonchalantly working, to the beginning of a newly laid road of logs. The noise of musketry and the smoke had become prodigious. On the logs of the road lay the first big pool of blood that many of them had ever seen. What it had come from they could not determine; there was nothing dead or dying there.

The men glanced askance at the swamp where the black shining water had risen almost level with the edges of the road; but the Colonel and his staff, still mounted, rode coolly over it, and the regiment followed.

The corduroy road through the heavily wooded swamp which the 3rd Zouaves now followed was the only inlet to the noisy scene of local

action, and the only outlet, too.

Except for watching the shells at Blue Bridge, the regiment had never been in battle, had never seen or heard a real battle; many had never even seen a wounded man. They understood that they were going into battle now; and now the regiment caught sight of its first wounded men. Stretchers passed close to them on which soldiers lay naked to the waist, some with breasts glistening red and wet from unstopped haemorrhage, some with white bodies marked only by the little round blue hole with its darker centre.

Soldiers passed them, limping, bloody rags dripping from thigh or knee; others staggered along with faces the colour of clay, leaning on the arms of comrades, still others were carried out feet first, sagging, a dead-weight in the arms of those who bore them. One man with half his fingers gone, the raw stumps spread, hurried out, screaming, and scattering blood as he ran.

The regiment passed an artilleryman lying in the water whose head, except for the lower jaw, was entirely missing; and another on his back in the ooze whose bowels were protruding between his fingers; and he was trying very feebly to force them back, while two comrades strove in vain to lift him.

The regiment sickened as it looked; here and there a young zouave turned deathly pale, reeled out of the ranks, leaned against a tree, nauseated, only to lurch forward again at the summons of the

provost guard; here and there a soldier disengaged his white turban from his fez and dropped it to form a sort of Havelock; for the vertical sun was turning the men dizzy, and the sights they saw were rapidly unnerving them.

They heard the tremendous thunder and felt the concussion of big guns; the steady raining rattle of musketry, the bark of howitzers, the sharp, clean crack of rifled field guns dismayed them.

Sometimes, far away, they could distinguish the full deep cheering of a Union regiment; and once they caught the distant treble battle cry of the South. There were moments when a sudden lull in the noise startled the entire regiment. Even their officers looked up sharply at such times. But ahead they could still see Colonel Craig riding calmly forward, his big horse picking its leisurely way over the endless road of logs; they could see the clipped gray head of Major Lent under its red forage-cap, steady, immovable, as he controlled his nervous mount with practised indifference.

It was broiling hot in the swamp; the Zouaves stood bathed in perspiration as the regiment halted for a few minutes, then they moved forward again toward a hard ridge of grass which glimmered green beyond the tangled thicket's edges.

Here the regiment was formed in line of battle, and ordered to lie down.

Stephen wiped his sweaty hands on his jacket and, lifting his head from the grass, looked cautiously around. Already there had been fighting here; a section of a dismantled battery stood in the road ahead; dead men lay around it; smoke still hung blue in the woods. The air reeked.

The Zouaves lay in long scarlet rows on the grass; their officers stood leaning on their naked swords, peering ahead where the Colonel, Major, and a mounted bugler were intently watching something--the two officers using field glasses. In a few moments both officers dismounted, flung their bridles to an orderly, and came back, walking rather quickly. Major Lent drawing his bright, heavy sword and tucking up his gold-embroidered sleeves as he came on.

"Now, boys," said Colonel Craig cheerfully, "we are going in. All you've got to do can be done quickly and thoroughly with the bayonet. Don't cock your muskets, don't fire unless you're told to. Perhaps you won't have to fire at all. All I want of you is to keep straight on after me--right through those dry woods, there. Try to keep your intervals and alignment; don't yell until you sight the enemy, don't lose your heads, trust your officers. Where they go you are safest."

He dropped his eye-glasses into his slashed pocket, drew out and put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. The soldiers saw him

smile and say something to Major Lent, saw him bare his handsome sword, saw the buglers setting the shining bugles to their lips.

"Now, _charge_, you red-legged rascals!" shouted Major Lent; and up from the grass rose a wave of scarlet and flashing steel.

Charge! Charge! echoed the bugles; a wailing storm, high among the tree tops, passed over them as they entered the dry woods on a run; branches crashed earthward, twig's and limbs crackled down in whirling confusion. But there was nothing in the woods except smoke--and the streaming storm shrilling overhead, raining down on them leaves and boughs and splintered sticks.

The belt of woodland was very narrow; already the men could see sunlight on the farther edge, and catch glimpses of fields; and still they ran forward, keeping their alignment as best they might among the trees; and came, very soon, to the wood's edge. Here they were halted and ordered to lie down again; and they lay there, close to the ground among the dead leaves, while from above living leaves rained on them in never-ending showers, and the wild tempest sped overhead unchecked.

Far out across the fields in the sunshine, looking diminutive as toys in the distance, four cannon puffed smoke toward them. The Zouaves could see the guns--see even the limbers and caissons behind, and the harnessed teams, and the cannoneers very busily at

work in the sunshine. Then a long low wall of white smoke suddenly appeared along a rail fence in front of the guns, and at the same time the air thickened with bullets storming in all about them.

The Colonel and the Major had run hastily out into the field. "Get up! Get up!" shouted the company officers. "Left dress, there! Forward! Don't cock your rifles; don't fire until you're told to. Steady there on the left. Forward! Forward!"

"Now yell, you red-legs! Yell!"

As they started running, their regimental colours fell, man and nag sprawling in the grass; and the entire line halted, bewildered. The next instant a zouave had lifted the colours, and was running forward; and: "Get on there! Continue the movement! What in hell's the matter with you Zouaves!" shouted their lieutenant-colonel. And the sagging scarlet line bellied out, straightened as the flanks caught up, and swept out into the sunshine with a cheer--the peculiar Zouave cheer--not very full yet, for they had not yet lost the troubled wonder of things.

Stephen, running with shouldered musket, saw close ahead a long line of blue smoke and flame, but instead of the enemy there was nothing hidden behind the smoke except a long field-ditch in which dry brush was burning.

Into the ditch tumbled the regiment, and lay panting, coughing, kicking out the embers, and hugging the ground closely, because now the storm that had swept the tree tops was shaving the weeds and grass around them; and the drone of bullets streaming over the ditch rose to a loud, fierce whine.

Up in the blue sky little white clouds suddenly unfolded themselves with light reports, and disappeared, leaving jagged streamers of vapour afloat here and there; the near jarring discharge of artillery shook the ground till bits of sod fell in particles, crumbling from the ditch's edge; the outrageous racket of musketry never slackened.

Lying there, they heard a sudden burst of cheering, and far to the left saw another regiment come tumbling into the ditch and crouch, huddled there in a blue line stretching as far away as they could see. And again the firing increased to a stunning roar, and there were more cheers; and, to their right, another regiment came running and rolling into the ditch.

Officers, recklessly erect, stood here and there along the interior of the ditch; then from the lair of each regiment flags emerged, bugles blew clear and impatient; there came an upheaval of bayonets, and the three regiments scrambled to their feet, over the ditch's edge, and surged forward into the sunshine.

Across the fields Stephen saw guns being limbered up; and drivers lashing their horses to a gallop across a bridge. The regiment on their left was firing by wings as it advanced, the regiment on the right had broken into a heavy run, yelling: "Hey! We want them guns! Wait a second, will yer? Where you takin' them guns to?"

There was a new rail fence close in front of the Zouaves, barring their way to the bridge; and suddenly, from behind it, men arose with levelled muskets; and the Zouaves dropped flat to the volley that buried the fence in smoke.

"Now, boys!" cried Colonel Craig, "we've got to have that bridge! So we'll finish this business right here with the bayonet. Come on and let's end it now!"

Major Lent ran forward and started to climb the smoky fence; everywhere the Zouaves were swarming along the newly split rails or driving their bayonets through the smoke at the gray phantoms clustering behind. Shots rang out, the crack of stock against stock, the ringing clamour and click of steel filled the air.

The zouave next to Stephen lurched up against him spouting blood from the neck; on the other side of him another, a sergeant, too, had gone stark mad, apparently, and was swinging his terrible sabre

bayonet without regard to friend or foe; and still another man of his squad, swearing horribly, had clutched a ghostly enemy in the smoke across the fence and was trying to strangle him with his bare hands.

Stephen, bewildered by a blow which glanced from his head to his left shoulder, clung to his musket and tried to stagger forward, but a bayonet seared his right temple, tearing the scalp and letting down a rush of blood all over his face and eyes. Blinded, the boy called instinctively: "Father! I'm hurt! Could you help me!"

Colonel Craig turned white under his tan, and looked back.

"I can't help you, my boy. Sergeant, will you look after my son?" And he ran forward into the infernal network of bayonets, calling out: "Get through there, boys. We might as well clean up this mess while we're about it. Pull down that fence! Never mind those men behind it!--rush it! Kick it over! Now come on! I don't ask you to do anything that I don't do. Major Lent and I will take you through. Come on and take that bridge!"

A captain, fighting back the bayonets with his sword, suddenly floundered to the fence top and clung, balanced on his belly, shouting hysterically:

"Look at the Lancers! Look at 'em coming! Now, Zouaves! Pull down the fence and give them a chance to charge the bridge!"

Over a low swell of land some horsemen trotted into view; behind them the horizon was suddenly filled with the swimming scarlet pennons of the Lancers. A thousand horses' heads shot up against the sky line, manes tossing; a thousand lance points fell to a glittering level.

They were cheering shrilly as they came on; the Zouaves heard them, the gray infantry regiment gave way, turned, filed off, retreating toward the bridge at a slow trot like some baffled but dangerous animal; and after it ran the Zouaves, firing, screaming, maddened to hysteria by their first engagement, until their panting officers and their bugles together barely managed to halt them short of the edges of utter annihilation just as a full Confederate brigade rose grimly from the wood's edge across the stream, ready to end their hysterical yelling for ever.

Stephen, sitting on the grass among the dead and stricken, tied his bloody turban, pulled the red fez close over it, smeared the blood from his eyes, and, clutching his musket, stood up unsteadily.

He could see the charge of the 8th Lancers--see the horsemen wheel and veer wildly as they received the fire of the Confederate troops

from the woods across the stream, squadron after squadron sheering off at a gallop and driving past the infantry, pell-mell, a wild riot of maddened horses, yelling riders, and streaming scarlet pennons descending in one vivid, headlong torrent to the bridge. But the structure was already hopelessly afire; and the baffled carbineers of the advance reined up at the edge of the burning timbers and sent an angry volley after the gray infantry now jogging back into the woods beyond. Then, suddenly, the Zouaves heard the Lancers cheering wildly in the smoke of the burning structure, but did not know what it meant.

It meant--Berkley.

Fear had squired him that day. When the bugles sounded through the cannon thunder and his squadron trotted out, Fear, on a paler horse than Death bestrides, cantered with him, knee to knee. Fear's startled eyes looked into his through the jetted smoke of musketry, through the tumult of the horses and the trumpets; Fear made his voice light and thin, so that he scarcely heard it amid the fierce cheering of his comrades, the pounding of hoofs, the futile clattering of equipments.

It was all a swift and terrible nightmare to him--the squadrons breaking into a gallop, the woods suddenly belted with smoke, the thud and thwack of bullets pelting leather and living flesh, the frantic plunging of stricken horses, the lightning down-crash of

riders hurled earthward at full speed, the brief glimpses of scarlet streaks under foot--of a horse's belly and agonised iron-shod feet, of a white face battered instantly into obliteration, of the ruddy smoke flowing with sparks amid which bugles rang above the clashing halt of maddened squadrons.

Then, through the rolling ocean of smoke, he saw officers and men trying to hack away and beat out the burning timbers--saw a reckless carbineer--his own tent-mate--dismount and run out across the planking which was already afire, saw him stumble and roll over as a bullet hit him, get to his knees blindly, trip and fall flat in the smoke. Then Fear bellowed in Berkley's ear; but he had already clapped spurs to his horse, cantering out across the burning planking and straight into the smoke pall.

"Where are you, Burgess?" he shouted. The Fear of Death stiffened his lips as he reined up in the whirling spark-shot obscurity.

"Burgess--damn you--answer me, can't you!" he stammered, half strangled in the smoke, trying to master his terrified mount with rein and knee and heel.

Vaguely he heard comrades shouting for him to come back, heard shells exploding amid the smoke, wheeled his staggering horse, bent swiftly and grasped at an inanimate form in the smoke, missed, dismounted and clutched the senseless carbineer--his comrade--and once his valet.

[Illustration: "He dismounted and clutched the senseless carbineer."]

Out of the fiery tunnel came tearing his terrified horse,
riderless; out of the billowing, ruddy vapours reeled Berkley,
dragging the carbineer.

It was the regiment cheering him that the Zouaves heard.

The fields were now swimming in bluish smoke; through it the Zouaves were reforming as they marched. Little heaps of brilliant colour dotting the meadow were being lifted and carried off the field by comrades; a few dismounted carbineers ran hither and thither, shooting hopelessly crippled horses. Here and there a dead lancer lay flat in the grass, his scarlet pennon a vivid spot beside him.

The hill road to the burning bridge was now choked with Colonel Arran's regiment, returning to the crest of the hill; through the blackish and rolling smoke from the bridge infantry were creeping swiftly forward toward the river bank, and very soon the intermittent picket firing began again, running up and down the creek bank and out across the swamp lands, noisily increasing as it woke up vicious volleys from the woods on the opposite bank, and

finally aroused the cannon to thunderous anger.

Berkley, standing to horse with his regiment on the sparsely wooded hill crest, could see the crowding convolutions of smoke rising from the thickets, as each gun spoke from the Confederate batteries. But to him their thunder was like the thunder in a dream.

Hour after hour the regiment stood to horse; hour after hour the battle roared west and south of them. An irregular cloud, slender at the base, spreading on top, towered to mid zenith above the forest. Otherwise, save for the fleecy explosion of shells in the quivering blue vault above, nothing troubled the sunshine that lay over hill and valley, wood and river and meadowland.

McDunn's battery was not firing; the Zouaves lay dozing awake in the young clover, the Lancers, standing to horse, looked out across the world of trees and saw nothing stirring save a bird or two winging hastily northward.

Berkley could distinguish a portion of the road that ran down to the burning bridge, where part of McDunn's battery was in position. Across the hills to the left a scarlet windrow undulating on either flank of the battery marked the line of battle where the Zouaves lay in a clover-field, within supporting distance of the guns.

Except for these, and a glimpse of Lowe's balloon overhead, Berkley could not see anything whatever even remotely connected with the uproar which continued steadily in the west and south. Nobody seemed to know whose troops were engaged, where they came from, whither they were trying to force a fiery road through a land in arms against their progress.

At times, to Berkley, it seemed as though every tree, every hill, every thicket was watching him with sombre intent; as if Nature herself were hostile, stealthy, sinister, screening terrors yet unloosed, silently storing up violence in dim woods, aiding and abetting ambush with all her clustering foliage; and that every river, every swamp, every sunny vista concealed some hidden path to death.

He stood rigid at his horse's head, lance in hand, dirty, smoke-blackened, his ears deafened by the cannonade, his eyes cool and alert, warily scanning hill and hollow and thicket.

Dead men of his regiment were borne past him; he glanced furtively at them, not yet certain that the lower form of fear had left him, not yet quite realising that he had blundered into manhood--that for the first time in his life he was ready to take his chance with life.

But, little by little, as the hours passed, there in the trodden grass he began to understand something of the unformulated decision that had been slowly growing in him--of the determination, taking shape, to deal more nobly with himself--with this harmless self which had accepted unworthiness and all its attributes, and which riven pride would have flung back at the civilisation which branded him as base.

It came--this knowledge--like a slowly increasing flare of light; and at last he said under his breath, to himself:

"Nothing is unworthily born that is born of God's own law. I have been what I chose. I can be what I will."

A gracious phantom grew under his eyes taking exquisite shape before him; and dim-eyed, he stared at it till it dwindled, faded, dissolved into empty air and sunshine.

No; he could never marry without revealing what he was; and that he would never do because of loyalty to that tender ghost which he must shield for ever even as he would have shielded her in life.

No living soul had any right to know. No love of his for any woman could ever justify betrayal of what alone concerned the dead.

The shells, which, short fused, had been bursting high above the swamp to the right, suddenly began to fall nearer the cavalry, and after a while a shell exploded among them, killing a horse.

They retired by squadrons, leisurely, and in good order; but the shells followed them, searching them out and now and then finding them with a deafening racket and cloud of smoke, out of which mangled horses reared, staggered, and rolled over screaming; out of which a rider, here and there was hurled sideways, head first, or sent spinning and headless among his white-faced comrades.

McDunn's guns had opened now, attempting to extinguish the fire of the troublesome Confederate battery. Berkley, teeth set, pallid, kept his place in the ranks, and hung to his horse's head until he got the animal calmed again. One of his sleeves was covered with blood from a comrade's horse, blown into fragments beside him.

He could see McDunn's gunners working methodically amid the vapours steaming back from the battery as it fired by sections; saw the guns jump, buried in smoke; saw the long flames flicker, flicker, flicker through the cannon mist; felt the solid air strike him in the face at each discharge.

Hallam, white as a sheet, stood motionless at the head of his troop; a shell had just burst, but it was as though he dared not

look back until Colonel Arran rode slowly over to the stricken company--and saw Berkley still standing at his horse's head, and gave him a look that the younger man never forgot.

Again, by troops, the Lancers retired; and again the yelling shells found them, and they retired to the base of a hill. And came upon a division in full panic.

Over a culvert and down a wooded road troops of all arms were riotously retreating, cavalry, baggage-waggons, battered fragments of infantry regiments, ambulances, all mixed and huddled pell-mell into a headlong retreat that stretched to the rear as far as the eye could see.

Astonished, the Lancers looked on, not understanding, fearful of some tremendous disaster. A regiment of regular cavalry of the Provost Guard was riding through the fugitives, turning, checking, cutting out, driving, separating the disorganised mob; but it was hard work, and many got away, and teamsters began to cut traces, and skulking cavalymen clapped spurs and rode over screeching deserters who blocked their path. It was a squalid sight; the Lancers looked on appalled.

Colonel Arran rode his horse slowly along the front of his regiment, talking quietly to his men.

"It's only one or two of the raw brigades and a few teamsters and frightened sutlers--that's all. Better that the Provost Guard should let them through; better to sift out that kind of soldier."

. . . He calmly turned his horse's head and rode back along the lines of horses and dismounted troopers, commenting reassuringly on what was taking place around them.

"There is never any safety in running away unless your officers order you to run. The discipline of a regiment is the only security for the individual. There is every chance of safety as long as a regiment holds together; no chance at all if it disintegrates.

"The regulars understand that; it is what makes them formidable; it is what preserves them individually, and every man knows it. The regulars don't run; it happens to be contrary to their traditions; but those traditions originated less in sentiment than in plain common-sense."

He turned his horse and walked the animal slowly along the lines.

"I am exceedingly gratified by the conduct of this regiment," he said. "You have done all that has been asked of you. To do more than is asked of you is not commendable in a soldier, though it may display individual courage. . . . The carbineer, Burgess, 10th

troop, Captain Hallam, was foolhardy to attempt the bridge without orders. . . . The lancer, Ormond, 10th troop, Captain Hallam, however, did his full duty--admirably--when he faced death to rescue a wounded comrade from the flames. . . . In England a Victoria Cross is given for deeds of this kind. The regiment respects him--and respects itself. . . . I care to believe that there is not one officer or trooper in my command who is not ready to lay down his life for a friend. . . . I am happy in the consciousness that it is not courage which is lacking in this command; it is only experience. And that will come; it came with the shells on the slope yonder. There is no more severe test of a regiment's discipline than to endure the enemy's fire without being able to retaliate."

The regiment's eyes were fastened on their colonel's tall heavy figure as he walked his powerful horse slowly to and fro along their front, talking to them in his calm, passionless manner. Strained muscles and tense nerves relaxed; breath came more regularly and naturally; men ventured to look about them more freely, to loosen the spasmodic grip on curb and snaffle, to speak to comrades in low tones, inquiring what damage other troops had sustained.

The regular cavalry of the Provost Guard had turned the tide of stragglers now, letting through only the wounded and the teams. But across the open fields wreckage from the battle was streaming in every direction; and so stupid and bewildered with fear were

some of the fugitives that McDunn's battery had to cease its fire for a time, while the officers ran forward through the smoke, shouting and gesticulating to warn the mass of skulkers out of the way.

And now a fearful uproar of artillery arose immediately to the west, shells began to rain in the river woods, then shrapnel, then, in long clattering cadence, volley succeeded volley, faster, faster, till the outcrash became one solid, rippling roar.

Far to the west across the country the Lancers saw regiments passing forward through the trees at a quick-step; saw batteries galloping hither and thither, aides-de-camp and staff-officers racing to and fro at full speed.

The 3rd Zouaves rose from the clover, shouldered muskets, and moved forward on a run; a staff-officer wheeled out of the road, jumped his horse over the culvert, and galloped up to Colonel Arran. And the next moment the Lancers were in the saddle and moving at a trot out toward the left of McDunn's battery.

They stood facing the woods, lances poised, for about ten minutes, when a general officer with dragoon escort came galloping down the road and through the meadow toward McDunn's battery. It was Claymore, their general of brigade.

"Retire by prolonge!" he shouted to the battery commander, pulling in his sweating horse. "We've got to get out of this!" And to Colonel Arran, who had ridden up, flushed and astonished: "We've got to leave this place," he repeated shortly. "They're driving the Zouaves in on us."

All along the edge of the woods the red breeches of the Zouaves were reappearing, slowly retreating in excellent order before something as yet unseen. The men turned every few paces to fire by companies, only to wheel again, jog-trot toward the rear, halt, load, swing to deliver their fire, then resume their jogging retreat.

Back they fell, farther, farther, while McDunn's battery continued to fire and retire by prolonge, and the Lancers, long weapons disengaged, accompanied them, ready to support the guns in an emergency.

The emergency seemed very near. Farther to the left a blue regiment appeared enveloped in spouting smoke, fairly hurled bodily from the woods; Egerton's 20th Dragoons came out of a concealed valley on a trot, looking behind them, their rear squadron firing from the saddle in orderly retreat; the Zouaves, powder soiled, drenched in sweat, bloody, dishevelled, passed to the left of the battery and lay down.

Then, from far along the stretch of woods, arose a sound, incessant, high-pitched--a sustained treble cadence, nearer, nearer, louder, shriller, like the excited cry of a hunting pack, bursting into a paroxysm of hysterical chorus as a long line of gray men leaped from the wood's edge and swept headlong toward the guns.

Berkley felt every nerve in his body leap as his lance fell to a level with eight hundred other lances; he saw the battery bury itself in smoke as gun after gun drove its cannister into obscurity or ripped the smoke with sheets of grape; he saw the Zouaves rise from the grass, deliver their fire, sink back, rise again while their front spouted smoke and flame.

The awful roar of the firing to the right deafened him; he caught a glimpse of squadrons of regular cavalry in the road, slinging carbines and drawing sabres; a muffled blast of bugles reached his ears; and the next moment he was trotting out into the smoke.

After that it was a gallop at full speed; and he remembered nothing very distinctly, saw nothing clearly, except that, everywhere among his squadron ran yelling men on foot, shooting, lunging with bayonets, striking with clubbed rifles. Twice he felt the shocking impact of his lance point; once he drove the ferruled counterpoise at a man who went down under his horse's feet. One moment there

was a perfect whirlwind of scarlet pennons flapping around him, another and he was galloping alone across the grass, lance crossed from right to left, tugging at his bridle. Then he set the reeking ferrule in his stirrup boot, slung the shaft from the braided arm loop, and drew his revolver--the new weapon lately issued, with its curious fixed ammunition and its cap imbedded.

There were groups of gray infantry in the field, walking, running, or standing still and firing; groups of lancers and dragoons trotting here and there, wheeling, galloping furiously at the men on foot. A number of foot soldiers were crowding around a mixed company of dragoons and Lancers, striking at them, shooting into them. He saw the Lieutenant-colonel of his own regiment tumble out of his saddle; saw Major Lent put his horse to a dead run and ride over a squad of infantry; saw Colonel Arran disengage his horse from the crush, wheel, and begin to use his heavy sabre in the mass around him.

Bugles sounded persistently; he set spurs to his tired horse and rode toward the buglers, and found himself beside Colonel Arran, who, crimson in the face, was whipping his way out with dripping sabre.

Across a rivulet on the edge of the woods he could see the regimental colours and the bulk of his regiment re-forming; and he spurred forward to join them, skirting the edge of a tangle of

infantry, dragoons, and lancers who were having a limited but bloody affair of their own in a cornfield where a flag tossed wildly--a very beautiful, square red flag, its folds emblazoned with a blue cross set with stars,

Out of the melee a score of dishevelled lancers came plunging through the corn, striking right and left at the infantry that clung to them with the fury of panthers; the square battle flag, flung hither and thither, was coming close to him; he emptied his revolver at the man who carried it, caught at the staff, missed, was almost blinded by the flashing blast from a rifle, set spurs to his horse, leaned wide from his saddle, seized the silk, jerked it from its rings, and, swaying, deluged with blood from a sword-thrust in the face, let his frantic horse carry him whither it listed, away, away, over the swimming green that his sickened eyes could see no longer.

CHAPTER XVI

On every highway, across every wood trail, footpath, and meadow streamed the wreckage of seven battle-fields. Through mud and rain crowded heavy artillery, waggons, herds of bellowing cattle, infantry, light batteries, exhausted men, wounded men, dead men on stretchers, men in straw-filled carts, some alive, some dying. Cannoneers cut traces and urged their jaded horses through the crush, cursed and screamed at by those on foot, menaced by bayonets

and sabres. The infantry, drenched, starving, plastered with mud to the waists, toiled doggedly on through the darkness; batteries in deplorable condition struggled from mud hole to mud hole; the reserve cavalry division, cut out and forced east, limped wearily ahead, its rear-guard firing at every step.

To the north, immense quantities of stores--clothing, provisions, material of every description were on fire, darkening the sky with rolling, inky clouds; an entire army corps with heavy artillery and baggage crossed the river enveloped in the pitchy, cinder-laden smoke from two bridges on fire. The forests, which had been felled from the Golden Farm to Fair Oaks to form an army's vast abattis, were burning in sections, sending roaring tornadoes of flame into rifle pits, redoubts, and abandoned fortifications. Cannon thundered at Ellison's Mills; shells rained hard on Gaines's Farm; a thousand simultaneous volleys of musketry mingled with the awful uproar of the cannon; uninterrupted sheets of light from the shells brightened the smoke pall like the continuous flare of electricity against a thundercloud. The Confederacy, victorious, was advancing wrapped in flame and smoke.

At Savage's Station the long railroad bridge was now on fire; trains and locomotives burned fiercely; millions of boxes of hard bread, barrels of flour, rice, sugar, coffee, salt pork, cases of shoes, underclothing, shirts, uniforms, tin-ware, blankets, ponchos, harness, medical stores, were in flames; magazines of ammunition, flat cars and box cars loaded with powder, shells, and

cartridges blazed and exploded, hurling jets and spouting fountains of fire to the very zenith.

And through the White Oak Swamp rode the Commander-in-chief of an army in full retreat, followed by his enormous staff and escort, abandoning the siege of Richmond, and leaving to their fate the wretched mass of sick and wounded in the dreadful hospitals at Liberty Hall. And the red battle flags of the Southland fluttered on every hill.

Claymore's mixed brigade, still holding together, closed the rear of Porter's powder-scorched _corps d'armee_.

The Zouaves of the 3rd Regiment--what was left of them--marched as flankers; McDunn's battery, still intact, was forced to unlimber every few rods; and the pouring rain turned to a driving golden fire in the red glare of the guns, which lighted up the halted squadrons of the Lancers ranged always in support.

Every rod in retreat was a running combat. In the darkness the discharge of the Zouaves' rifles ran from the guns' muzzles like streams of molten metal spilling out on the grass. McDunn's guns spirted great lumps of incandescence; the fuses of the shells in the sky showered the darkness with swarming sparks.

Toward ten o'clock the harried column halted on a hill and bivouacked without fires, food, or shelter. The Zouaves slept on their arms in the drenched herbage; the Lancers, not daring to unsaddle, lay down on the grass under their patient horses, bridle tied to wrist. An awful anxiety clutched officers and men. Few slept; the ceaseless and agonised shrieking from an emergency hospital somewhere near them in the darkness almost unnerved them.

At dawn shells began to plunge downward among the Dragoons. McDunn's battery roused itself to reply, but muddy staff-officers arrived at full speed with orders for Claymore to make haste; and the starving command staggered off stiffly through the mud, their ears sickened by the piteous appeals of the wounded begging not to be abandoned.

Berkley, his face a mass of bloody rags, gazed from his wet saddle with feverish eyes at the brave contract surgeons standing silent amid their wounded under the cedar trees.

Cripples hobbled along the lines, beseeching, imploring, catching at stirrups, plucking feebly, blindly at the horses' manes for support.

"Oh, my God!" sobbed a wounded artilleryman, lifting himself from the blood-stained grass, "is this what I enlisted for? Are you boys going to leave us behind to rot in rebel prisons?"

"Damn you!" shrieked another, "you ain't licked! What'n hell are you runnin' away for? Gimme a gun an' a hoss an' I'll go back with you to the river!"

And another pointed a mangled and shaking hand at the passing horsemen.

"Oh, hell!" he sneered, "we don't expect anything of the cavalry, but why are them Zouaves skedaddlin'? They fit like wild cats at the river. Halt! you red-legged devils. You're goin' the wrong way!"

A Sister of Charity, her snowy, wide-winged headdress limp in the rain, came out of a shed and stood at the roadside, slender hands joined imploringly.

"You mustn't leave your own wounded," she kept repeating. "You wouldn't do that, gentlemen, would you? They've behaved so well; they've done all that they could. Won't somebody tell General McClellan how brave they were? If he knew, he would never leave them here."

The Lancers looked down at her miserably as they rode; Colonel Arran passed her, saluting, but with heavy, flushed face averted;

Berkley, burning with fever, leaned from his saddle, cap in hand.

"We can't help it, Sister. The same thing may happen to us in an hour. But we'll surely come back; you never must doubt that!"

Farther on they came on a broken-down ambulance, the mules gone, several dead men half buried in the wet straw, and two Sisters of Charity standing near by in pallid despair.

Colonel Arran offered them lead-horses, but they were timid and frightened; and Burgess gave his horse to the older one, and Berkley took the other up behind him, where she sat sideways clutching his belt, white coiffe aflutter, feet dangling.

At noon the regiment halted for forage and rations procured from a waggon train which had attempted to cross their line of march. The rain ceased: a hot sun set their drenched clothing and their horses' flanks steaming. At two o'clock they resumed their route; the ragged, rain-blackened pennons on the lance heads dried out scarlet; a hot breeze set in, carrying with it the distant noise of battle.

All that afternoon the heavy sound of the cannonade jarred their ears. And at sunset it had not ceased.

Berkley's Sister of Charity clung to his belt in silence for a while. After a mile or two she began to free her mind in regard to the distressing situation of her companion and herself. She informed Berkley that the negro drivers had become frightened and had cut the traces and galloped off; that she and the other Sister were on their way to the new base at Azalea Court House, where thousands of badly wounded were being gathered from the battles of the last week, and where conditions were said to be deplorable, although the hospital boats had been taking the sick to Alexandria as fast as they could be loaded.

She was a gentle little thing, with ideas of her own concerning the disaster to the army which was abandoning thousands of its wounded to the charity and the prisons of an enemy already too poor to feed and clothe its own.

"Some of our Sisters stayed behind, and many of the medical staff and even the contract surgeons remained. I hope the rebels will be gentle with them. I expected to stay, but Sister Aurelienne and I were ordered to Azalea last night. I almost cried my eyes out when I left our wounded. The shells were coming into the hospital yesterday, and one of them killed two of our wounded in the straw. Oh, it was sad and terrible. I am sure the rebels didn't fire on us on purpose. Do you think so?"

"No, I don't. Were you frightened, Sister."

"Oh, yes," she said naively, "and I wished I could run into the woods and hide."

"But you didn't?"

"Why, no, I couldn't," she said, surprised.

The fever in his wound was making him light-headed. At intervals he imagined that it was Ailsa seated behind him, her arms around his waist, her breath cool and fragrant on his neck; and still he knew she was a phantom born of fever, and dared not speak--became sly, pretending he did not know her lest the spell break and she vanish into thin air again.

What the little sister said was becoming to him only a pretty confusion of soft sounds; at moments he was too deaf to hear her voice at all; then he heard it and still believed it to be Ailsa who was speaking; then, for a few seconds, reality cleared his clouded senses; he heard the steady thunder of the cannonade, the steady clattering splash of his squadron; felt the hot, dry wind scorching his stiffened cheek and scalp where the wound burned and throbbed under a clotted bandage.

When the regiment halted to fill canteens the little sister washed

and re-bandaged his face and head.

It was a ragged slash running from the left ear across the cheek-bone and eyebrow into the hair above the temple--a deep, swollen, angry wound.

"What _were_ you doing when you got this?" she asked in soft consternation, making him as comfortable as possible with the scanty resources of her medical satchel. Later, when the bugles sounded, she came back from somewhere down the line, suffered him to lift her up behind him, settled herself, slipped both arms confidently around his waist, and said:

"So you are the soldier who took the Confederate battle flag? Why didn't you tell me? Ah--I know. The bravest never tell."

"There is nothing to tell," he replied. "They captured a guidon from us. It evens the affair."

She said, after a moment's thought; "It speaks well for a man to have his comrades praise him as yours praise you."

"You mean the trooper Burgess," he said wearily. "He's always chattering."

"All who spoke to me praised you," she observed. "Your colonel said: 'He does not understand what fear is. He is absolutely fearless.'"

"My colonel has been misinformed, Sister. I am intelligent enough to be afraid--philosopher enough to realise that it doesn't help me. So nowadays I just go ahead."

"Trusting in God," she murmured.

He did not answer.

"Is it not true, soldier?"

But the fever was again transfiguring her into the shape of Ailsa Paige, and he remained shyly silent, fearing to disturb the vision--yet knowing vaguely that it was one.

She sighed; later, in silence, she repeated some Credos and Hail Marys, her eyes fixed on space, the heavy cannonade dinning in her ears. All around her rode the Lancers, tall pennoned weapons swinging from stirrup and loop, bridles loose under their clasped hands. The men seemed stupefied with fatigue; yet every now and then they roused themselves to inquire after her comfort or to

offer her a place behind them. She timidly asked Berkley if she tired him, but he begged her to stay, alarmed lest the vision of Ailsa depart with her; and she remained, feeling contented and secure in her drowsy fatigue. Colonel Arran dropped back from the head of the column once to ride beside her. He questioned her kindly; spoke to Berkley, also, asking with grave concern about his wound. And Berkley answered in his expressionless way that he did not suffer.

But the little Sister of Charity behind his back laid one finger across her lips and looked significantly at Colonel Arran; and when the colonel again rode to the head of the weary column his face seemed even graver and more careworn.

By late afternoon they were beyond sound of the cannonade, riding through a golden light between fields of stacked wheat. Far behind in the valley they could see the bayonets of the Zouaves glistening; farther still the declining sun glimmered on the guns of the 10th battery. Along a parallel road endless lines of waggons stretched from north to south, escorted by Egerton's Dragoons.

To Berkley the sunset world had become only an infernal pit of scarlet strung with raw nerves. The terrible pain in his face and head almost made him lose consciousness. Later he seemed to be drifting into a lurid sea of darkness, where he no longer felt his

saddle or the movement of his horse; he scarcely saw the lanterns clustering, scarcely heard the increasing murmur around him, the racket of picket firing, the noise of many bewildered men, the cries of staff-officers directing divisions and brigades to their camping ground, the confused tumult which grew nearer, nearer, mounting like the ominous clamour of the sea as the regiment rode through Azalea under the July stars.

He might have fallen from his saddle; or somebody perhaps lifted him, for all he knew. In the glare of torches he found himself lying on a moving stretcher. After that he felt straw under him; and vaguely wondered why it did not catch fire from his body, which surely now was but a mass of smouldering flame.

For days the fever wasted him--not entirely, for at intervals he heard cannon, and always the interminable picket firing; and he heard bugles, too, and recognised the various summons. But it was no use trying to obey them--no use trying to find his legs. He could not get up without his legs--he laughed weakly at the thought; then, drowsy, indifferent, decided that they had been shot away, but could not remember when; and it bothered him a good deal.

Other things bothered him; he was convinced that his mother was in the room. At intervals he was aware of Hallam's handsome face, cut out like a paper picture from *Harper's Weekly* and pasted flat on the tent wall. Also there were too many fire zouaves around his

bed--if it was a bed, this vague vibrating hammock he occupied. It was much more like a hollow nook inside a gigantic pendulum which swung eternally to and fro until it swung him into senselessness--or aroused him with fierce struggles to escape. But his mother's slender hand sometimes arrested the maddening motion, or--and this was curiously restful--she cleverly transferred him to a cradle, which she rocked, leaning close over him. Only she kept him wrapped up too warmly.

And after a long while there came a day when his face became cooler, and his skin grew wet with sweat; and on that day he partly unclosed his eyes and saw Colonel Arran sitting beside him.

Surprised, he attempted to sit up, but not a muscle of his body obeyed him, and he lay there stupid, inert, hollow eyes fixed meaninglessly on his superior, who spoke cautiously.

"Berkley, do you know me?"

His lips twitched a voiceless affirmative.

Colonel Arran said: "You are going to get well, now. . . . Get well quickly, because--the regiment misses you. . . . What is it you desire to say? Make the effort if you wish."

Berkley's sunken eyes remained focussed on space; he was trying to consider. Then they turned painfully toward Colonel Arran again.

"Ailsa Paige?" he whispered.

The other said quietly: "She is at the base hospital near Azalea. I have seen her. She is well. . . . I did not tell her you were ill. She could not have left anyway. . . . Matters are not going well with the army, Berkley."

"Whipped?" His lips barely formed the question.

Colonel Arran's careworn features flushed.

"The army has been withdrawing from the Peninsula. It is the commander-in-chief who has been defeated--not the Army of the Potomac."

"Back?"

"Yes, certainly we shall go back. This rebellion seems to be taking more time to extinguish than the people and the national authorities supposed it would require. But no man must doubt our ultimate success. I do not doubt it. I never shall. You must

not. It will all come right in the end."

"Regiment?" whispered Berkley.

"The regiment is in better shape, Berkley. Our remounts have arrived; our wounded are under shelter, and comfortable. We need rest, and we're getting it here at Azalea, although they shell us every day. We ought to be in good trim in a couple of weeks. You'll be in the saddle long before that. Your squadron has become very proud of you; all the men in the regiment have inquired about you. Private Burgess spends his time off duty under the oak trees out yonder watching your window like a dog. . . . I--ah--may say to you, Berkley, that you--ah--have become a credit to the regiment. Personally--and as your commanding officer--I wish you to understand that I am gratified by your conduct. I have said so in my official reports."

Berkley's sunken eyes had reverted to the man beside him. After a moment his lips moved again in soundless inquiry.

Colonel Arran replied: "The Zouaves were very badly cut up; Major Lent was wounded by a sabre cut. He is nearly well now. Colonel Craig and his son were not hurt. The Zouaves are in cantonment about a mile to the rear. Both Colonel Craig and his son have been here to see you--" he hesitated, rose, stood a moment undecided.

"Mrs. Craig--the wife of Colonel Craig--has been here. Her plantation, Paigecourt, is in this vicinity I believe. She has requested the medical authorities to send you to her house for your convalescence. Do you wish to go?"

The hollow-eyed, heavily bandaged face looked up at him from the straw; and Colonel Arran looked down at it, lips aquiver.

"Berkley--if you go there, I shall not see you again until you return to the regiment. I--" suddenly his gray face began to twitch again--and he set his jaw savagely to control it.

"Good-bye," he said. . . "I wish--some day--you could try to think less harshly of me. I am a--very--lonely man."

Berkley closed his eyes, but whether from weakness or sullen resentment the older man could not know. He stood looking down wistfully at the boy for a moment, then turned and went heavily away with blurred eyes that did not recognise the woman in bonnet and light summer gown who was entering the hospital tent. As he stood aside to let her pass he heard his name pronounced, in a cold, decisive voice; and, passing his gloved hand across his eyes to clear them, recognised Celia Craig.

"Colonel Arran," she said coolly, "is it necessa'y fo' me to request yo' permission befo' I am allowed to move Philip Berkley to my own house?"

"No, madam. The brigade surgeon is in charge. But I think I can secure for you the necessary authority to do so if you wish."

She thanked him haughtily, and passed on; and he turned and walked out, impassive, silent, a stoop to his massive shoulders which had already become characteristic.

And that evening Berkley lay at Paigecourt in the chintz-hung chamber where, as a girl, his mother had often slept, dreaming the dreams that haunt young hearts when the jasmine fragrance grows heavier in the stillness and the magnolia's snowy chalice is offered to the moon, and the thrush sings in the river thickets, and the fire-fly's lamp drifts through the fairy woods.

Celia told him this on the third day, late in the afternoon--so late that the westering sun was already touching the crests of the oak woods, and all the thickets had turned softly purple like the bloom on a plum; the mounting scent of phlox from the garden was growing sweeter, and the bats fluttered and dipped and soared in the calm evening sky.

She had been talking of his mother when she was Constance Paige and wore a fillet over her dark ringlets and rode to hounds at ten with the hardest riders in all Prince Clarence County.

"And this was her own room, Phil; nothing in it has been moved, nothing changed; this is the same bird and garland chintz, matching the same wall-paper; this is the same old baid with its fo' ca'ved columns and its faded canopy, the same gilt mirror where she looked and saw reflected there the loveliest face in all the valley. . . .

A child's face, Phil--even a child's face when she drew aside her bridal veil to look. . . . Ah--God--" She sighed, looking down at her clasped hands, "if youth but knew--if youth but knew!"

He lay silent, the interminable rattle of picket firing in his ears, his face turned toward the window. Through it he could see green grass, a magnolia in bloom, and a long flawless spray of Cherokee roses pendant from the gallery.

Celia sighed, waited for him to speak, sighed again, and picked up the Baltimore newspaper to resume her reading if he desired.

Searching the columns listlessly, she scanned the headings, glanced over the letter press in silence, then turned the crumpled page.

Presently she frowned.

"Listen to this, Philip; they say that there is yellow fever among the Yankee troops in Louisiana. It would be like them to bring that horror into the Carolina and Virginia----"

He turned his head suddenly, partly rose from where he lay; and she caught her breath and bent swiftly over him, placing one hand on his arm and gently forcing him down upon the-pillow again.

"Fo'give me, dear," she faltered. "I forgot what I was reading----"

He said, thoughtfully: "Did you ever hear exactly how my mother died, Celia? . . . But I know you never did. . . . And I think I had better tell you."

"She died in the fever camp at Silver Bayou, when you were a little lad," whispered Celia.

"No."

"Philip! What are you saying?"

"You don't know how my mother died," he said quietly.

"Phil, we had the papers--and the Governor of Louisiana wrote us

himse'f----"

"I know what he wrote and what the papers published was not true.

I'll tell you how she died. When I was old enough to take care of myself I went to Silver Bayou. . . . Many people in that town had

died; some still survived. I found the parish records. I found

one of the camp doctors who remembered that accursed year of plague--an old man, withered, indifferent, sleeping his days away on the rotting gallery of his tumble-down house. _He_ knew. . . .

And I found some of the militia still surviving; and one among them retained a confused memory of my mother--among the horrors of that poisonous year----"

He lay silent, considering; then: "I was old enough to remember, but not old enough to understand what I understood later. . . . Do you want to know how my mother died?"

Celia's lips moved in amazed assent.

"Then I will tell you. . . . They had guards north, east, and west of us. They had gone mad with fright; the whole land was quarantined against us; musket, flintlock, shotgun, faced us through the smoke of their burning turpentine. I was only a little lad, but the horror of it I have never forgotten, nor my mother's terror--not for herself, for me."

He lay on his side, thin hands clasped, looking not at Celia but beyond her at the dreadful scene his fancy was painting on the wall of his mother's room:

"Often, at night, we heard the shots along the dead line. Once they murdered a man behind our water garden. Our negroes moaned and sobbed all day, all night, helpless, utterly demoralised. Two were shot swimming; one came back dying from snake bite. I saw him dead on the porch.

"I saw men fall down in the street with the black vomit--women, also--and once I saw two little children lying dead against a garden wall in St. Catharine's Alley. I was young, but I remember."

A terrible pallor came into his wan face.

"And I remember my mother," he said; "and her pleading with the men who came to the house to let her send me across the river where there was no fever. I remember her saying that it was murder to imprison children there in Silver Bayou; that I was perfectly well so far. They refused. Soldiers came and went. Their captain died; others died, we heard. Then my mother's maid, Alice, an octoroon, died on the East Gallery. And the quarters went insane that day.

"When night came an old body-servant of my grandfather scratched at mother's door. I heard him. I thought it was Death. I was half dead with terror when mother awoke and whispered to me to dress in the dark and to make no sound.

"I remember it perfectly--remember saying: 'I won't go if you don't, mother. I'd rather be with you.' And I remember her saying: 'You shall not stay here to die when you are perfectly well. Trust mother, darling; Jerry will take you to Sainte Jacqueline in a boat.'

"And after that it is vaguer--the garden, the trench dug under the north wall--and how mother and I, in deadly fear of moccasins, down on all fours, crept after Jerry along the ditch to the water's edge----"

His face whitened again; he lay silent for a while, crushing his wasted hands together.

"Celia, they fired on us from the levee. After that I don't know; I never knew what happened. But that doctor at Silver Bayou said that I was found a mile below in a boat with the first marks of the plague yellowing my skin. Celia, they never found my mother's body. It is not true that she died of fever at Silver Bayou. She fell under the murderous rifles of the levee guard--gave her life

trying to save me from that pest-stricken prison. Jerry's body was found stranded in the mud twenty miles below. He had been shot through the body. . . . And now you know how my mother died."

He raised himself on one elbow, watching Celia's shocked white face for a moment or two, then wearily turned toward the window and sank back on his pillows.

In the still twilight, far away through the steady fusillade from the outposts, he heard the dull boom-booming of cannon, and the heavy shocks of the great guns aboard the Union gun-boats. But it sounded very far off; a mocking-bird sang close under his window; the last rosy bar faded from the fleecy cloud bank in the east.

Night came abruptly--the swift Southern darkness quickly emblazoned with stars; and the whip-poor-wills began their ghostly calling; and the spectres of the mist crept stealthily inland.

"Celia?"

Her soft voice answered from the darkness near him.

He said: "I knew this was her room before you told me. I have seen her several times."

"Good God, Phil!" she faltered, "what are you saying?"

"I don't know. . . . I saw her the night I came here."

After a long silence Celia rose and lighted a candle. Holding it a little above her pallid face she glided to his bedside and looked down at him. After a moment, bending, she touched his face with her palm; then her cool finger-tips brushed the quiet pulse at his wrist.

"Have I any fever?"

"No, Phil."

"I thought not. . . . I saw mother's face a few moments ago in that mirror behind you."

Celia sank down on the bed's edge, the candle trembling in her hand. Then, slowly, she turned her head and looked over her shoulder, moving cautiously, until her fascinated eyes found the glass behind her. The mirror hung there reflecting the flowered wall opposite; a corner of the bed; nothing else.

He said in an even voice;

"From the first hour that you brought me into this room, she has been here. I knew it instantly. . . . The first day she was behind those curtains--was there a long while. I knew she was there; I watched the curtains, expecting her to step out. I waited all day, not understanding that I--that it was better that I should speak. I fell asleep about dusk. She came out then and sat where you are sitting."

"It was a dream, Phil. It was fever. Try to realise what you are saying!"

"I do. The next evening I lay watching; and I saw a figure reflected in the mirror. It was not yet dusk. Celia, in the sunset light I saw her standing by the curtains. But it was star-light before she came to the bed and looked down at me.

"I said very quietly: 'Mother dear!' _Then_ she spoke to me; and I knew she was speaking, but I could not hear her voice. . . . It was that way while she stood beside me--I could not hear her, Celia. I could not hear what she was saying. It was no spirit I saw--no phantom from the dead there by my bed, no ghost--no restless wraith, grave-driven through the night. I believe she is living. She knows I believe it. . . . As you sat here, a moment ago, reading to me, I saw her reflected for a moment in the mirror behind you, passing into the room beyond. Her hair is perfectly white, Celia--or," he said vaguely to himself, "was it something

she wore?--like the bandeaux of the Sisters of Charity----"

The lighted candle fell from Celia's nerveless fingers and rolled over and over across the floor, trailing a smoking wick. Berkley's hand steadied her trembling arm.

"Why are you frightened?" he asked calmly.

"There is nothing dead about what I saw."

"I c-can't he'p myse'f," stammered Celia; "you say such frightful things to me--you tell me that they happen in my own house--in _her_ own room--How can I be calm? How can I believe such things of--of Constance Berkley--of yo' daid mother----"

"I don't know," he said dully.

The star-light sparkled on the silver candle-stick where it lay on the floor in a little pool of wax. Quivering all over, Celia stooped to lift, relight it, and set it on the table. And, over her shoulder, he saw a slim shape enter the doorway.

"Mother dear?" he whispered.

And Celia turned with a cry and stood swaying there in the rays of the candle.

But it was only a Sister of Charity--a slim, childish figure under the wide white head-dress--who had halted, startled at Celia's cry. She was looking for the Division Medical Director, and the sentries had misinformed her--and she was very sorry, very deeply distressed to have frightened anybody--but the case was urgent--a Sister shot near the picket line on Monday; and authority to send her North was, what she had come to seek. Because the Sister had lost her mind completely, had gone insane, and no longer knew them, knew nobody, not even herself, nor the hospital, nor the doctors, nor even that she lay on a battle-field. And she was saying strange and dreadful things about herself and about people nobody had ever heard of. . . . Could anybody tell her where the Division Medical Director could be found?

It was not yet daybreak when Berkley awoke in his bed to find lights in the room and medical officers passing swiftly hither and thither, the red flames from their candles blowing smokily in the breezy doorways.

The picket firing along the river had not ceased. At the same instant he felt the concussion of heavy guns shaking his bed. The lawn outside the drawn curtains resounded with the hurrying clatter of waggons, the noise of pick and spade and crack of hammer and

mallet.

He drew himself to a sitting posture. A regimental surgeon passing through the room glanced at him humorously, saying: "You've got a pretty snug berth here, son. How does it feel to sleep in a real bed?" And, extinguishing his candle, he went away through the door without waiting for any answer.

Berkley turned toward the window, striving to reach the drawn curtains. And at length he managed to part them, but it was all dark outside. Yet the grounds were evidently crowded with waggons and men; he recognised sounds which indicated that tents were being erected, drains and sinks dug; the rattle of planks and boards were significant of preparation for the construction of "shebangs."

Farther away on the dark highway he could hear the swift gallop of cavalry and the thudding clank of light batteries, all passing in perfect darkness. Then, leaning closer to the sill, he gazed between the curtains far into the southwest; and saw the tall curve of Confederate shells traced in whirling fire far down the river, the awful glare of light as the enormous guns on the Union warships replied.

Celia, her lovely hair over her shoulders, a scarf covering her night-dress, came in carrying a lighted candle; and instantly a voice from outside the window bade her extinguish the light or draw

the curtain.

She looked at Berkley in a startled manner, blew out the flame, and came around between his bed and the window, drawing the curtains entirely aside.

"General Claymore's staff has filled eve'y room in the house except yours and mine," she said in her gentle, bewildered way. "There's a regiment--Curt's Zouaves--encamped befo' the west quarters, and a battery across the drive, and all the garden is full of their horses and caissons."

"Poor little Celia," he said, reaching out to touch her hand, and drawing her to the bed's edge, where she sat down helplessly.

"The Yankee officers are all over the house," she repeated.

"They're up in the cupola with night-glasses now. They are ve'y polite. Curt took off his riding boots and went to sleep on my bed--and oh he is so dirty!--my darling Curt' my own husband!--too dirty to touch! I could cry just to look at his uniform, all black and stained and the gold entirely gone from one sleeve! And Stephen!--oh, Phil, some mise'ble barber has shaved the heads of all the Zouaves, and Steve is perfectly disfigured!--the poor, dear boy"--she laughed hysterically--"he had a hot bath and I've been mending the rags that he and Curt call unifo'ms--and I found clean flannels fo' them both in the attic----"

"_What_ does all this mean--all this camping outside?" he interrupted gently.

"Curt doesn't know. The camps and hospitals west of us have been shelled, and all the river roads are packed full of ambulances and stretchers going east."

"Where is my regiment?"

"The Lancers rode away yesterday with General Stoneman--all except haidqua'ters and one squadron--yours, I think--and they are acting escort to General Sykes at the overseers house beyond the oak grove. Your colonel is on his staff, I believe."

He lay silent, watching the burning fuses of the shells as they soared up into the night, whirling like fiery planets on their axes, higher, higher, mounting through majestic altitudes to the pallid stars, then, curving, falling faster, faster, till their swift downward glare split the darkness into broad sheets of light.

"Phil," she whispered, "I think there is a house on fire across the river!"

Far away in the darkness rows of tiny windows in an unseen mansion had suddenly become brilliantly visible.

"It--it must be Mr. Ruffin's house," she said in an awed voice.

"Oh, Phil! It is! Look! It's all on fire--it's--oh, see the flames on the roof! This is terrible--terrible--" She caught her breath.

"Phil! There's another house on fire! Do you see--do you see! It's Ailsa's house--Marye-mead! Oh, how could they set it on fire--how could they have the heart to burn that sweet old place!"

"Is that Marye-mead?" he asked.

"It must be. That's where it ought to stand--and--oh! oh! it's all on fire, Phil, all on fire!"

"Shells from the gun-boats," he muttered, watching the entire sky turn crimson as the flames burst into fury, lighting up clumps of trees and outhouses. And, as they looked, the windows of another house began to kindle ominously; little tongues of fire fluttered over a distant cupola, leaped across to a gallery, ran up in vinelike tendrils which flowered into flame, veining everything in a riotous tangle of brilliancy. And through the kindling darkness the sinister boom--boom! of the guns never ceased, and the shells

continued to mount, curve, and fall, streaking the night with golden incandescence.

Outside the gates, at the end of the cedar-lined avenue, where the highway passes, the tumult was increasing every moment amid shouts, cracking of whips, the jingle and clash of traces and metallic racket of wheels. The house, too, resounded with the heavy hurried tread of army boots trampling up and down stairs and crossing the floors above in every direction.

In the summer kitchen loud-voiced soldiers were cooking; there came the clatter of plates from the dining-room, the odour of hot bread and frying pork.

"All my negroes except old Peter and a quadroon maid have gone crazy," said Celia hopelessly. "I had them so comfortably quartered and provided for!--Cary, the overseer, would have looked after them while the war lasts--but the sight of the blue uniforms unbalanced them, and they swarmed to the river, where the contraband boats were taking runaways. . . . Such foolish creatures! They were very happy here and quite safe and well treated. . . . And everyone has deserted, old and young!--toting their bundles and baskets on their silly heads--every negro on Paigecourt plantation, every servant in this house except Peter and Sadie has gone with the contrabands . . . I'm sure I don't know what these soldiers are cooking in the kitchen. I expect they'll

end by setting the place afire, and I told Curt so, but he can't
he'p it, and I can't. It's ve'y hard to see the house turned out
of the windows, and the lawns and gardens cut to pieces by hoofs
and wheels, but I'm only too thankful that Curt can find shelter
under this roof, and nothing matters any mo' as long as he and
Stephen are alive and well."

"Haven't you heard from Ailsa yet?" asked Berkley in a low voice.

"Oh, Phil! I'm certainly worried. She was expecting to go on
board some hospital boat at the landing the day befo' your regiment
arrived. I haven't set eyes on her since. A gun-boat was to take
one of the Commission's steamers to Fortress Monroe, and all that
day the fleet kept on firing at our--at the Confederate batteries
over the river"--she corrected herself wearily--"and I was so
afraid, that Ailsa's steamer would try to get out----"

"Did it?"

"I don't know. There are so many, many boats at the landing, and
there's been so much firing, and nobody seems to know what is
happening or where anybody is. . . . And I don't know where Ailsa
is, and I've been ve'y mise'ble because they say some volunteer
nurses have been killed----"

"What!"

"I didn't want to tell you, Phil--until you were better----"

"Tell me what?" he managed to say, though a terrible fear was stiffening his lips and throat.

She said dully: "They get shot sometimes. You remember yo'se'f what that Sister of Charity said last night. I heard Ailsa cautioning Letty--the little nurse, Miss Lynden----"

"Yes, I know. What else?"

Celia's underlip quivered: "Nothing, only Ailsa told me that she was ordered to the field hospital fo' duty befo' she went aboard the commission boat--and she never came back--and there was a battle all that day----"

"Is that all?" he demanded, rising on one elbow. "Is there anything else you are concealing?"

"No, Phil. I'd tell you if there was. Perhaps I'm foolish to be so nervous--but I don't know--that Sister of Charity struck by a bullet--and to think of Ailsa out there under fire--" She closed

her eyes and sat shivering in the gray chill of the dawn, the tears silently stealing over her pale cheeks. Berkley stared out of the window at a confused and indistinct mass of waggons and tents and moving men, but the light was still too dim to distinguish uniforms; and presently Celia leaned forward and drew the curtains.

Then she turned and took Berkley's hands in hers.

"Phil, dear," she said softly, "I suspect how it is with you and Ailsa. Am I indiscreet to speak befo' you give me any warrant?"

He said nothing.

"The child certainly is in love with you. A blind woman could divine that," continued Celia wistfully. "I am glad, Phil, because I believe you are as truly devoted to her as she is to you. And when the time comes--if God spares you both----"

"You are mistaken," he said quietly, "there is no future before us."

She coloured in consternation. "Wh--why I certainly supposed--believed----"

"Celia!"

"W-what, dear?"

"Don't you _know_ I cannot marry?"

"Why not, Philip?"

"Could I marry Ailsa Craig unless I first told her that my father and my mother were never married?" he said steadily.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried, tears starting to her eyes again, "do you think that would weigh with a girl who is so truly and unselfishly in love with you?"

"You don't understand," he said wearily. "I'd take _that_ chance now. But do you think me disloyal enough to confess to any woman on earth what my mother, if she were living, would sacrifice her very life to conceal?"

He bent his head, supporting it in his hands, speaking as though to himself:

"I believe that the brain is the vehicle, not the origin of thought. I believe a brain becomes a mind only when an immortality

exterior to ourselves animates it. And this is what is called the soul. . . . Whatever it is, it is what I saw--or what that _something_, exterior to my body, recognised.

"Perhaps these human eyes of mine did not see her. Something that belongs to me saw the immortal visitor; something, that is the vital part of me, saw, recognised, and was recognised."

For a long while they sat there, silent; the booming guns shook the window; the clatter and uproar of the passing waggon train filled their ears.

Suddenly the house rocked under the stunning crash of a huge gun. Celia sprang to her feet, caught at the curtain as another terrific blast shattered the window-panes and filled the room with acrid dust.

Through the stinging clouds of powdered plaster Colonel Craig entered the room, hastily pulling on his slashed coat as he came.

"There's a fort in the rear of us--don't be frightened, Celia. I think they must be firing at----"

His voice was drowned in the thunder of another gun; Celia made her way to him, hid her face on his breast as the room shook again and the plaster fell from the ceiling, filling the room with blinding

dust.

"Oh, Curt," she gasped, "this is dreadful. Philip cannot stay here----"

"Better pull the sheets over his head," said her husband, meeting Berkley's eyes with a ghost of a smile. "It won't last long; and there are no rebel batteries that can reach Paigecourt." He kissed her. "How are you feeling, dear? I'm trying to arrange for you to go North on the first decent transport----"

"I want to stay with you, Curt," she pleaded, tightening her arms around his neck. "Can't I stay as long as my husband and son are here? I don't wish to go----"

"You can't stay," he said gently. "There is no immediate danger here at Paigecourt, but the army is turning this landing into a vast pest hole. It's deadly unhealthy. I wish you to go home just as soon as I can secure transportation----"

"And let them burn Paigecourt? Who is there to look after----"

"We'll have to take such chances, Celia. The main thing is for you to pack up and go home as soon as you possibly can. . . . I've got to go out now. I'll try to come back to-night. The General

understands that it's your house, and that you are my wife; and there's a guard placed and a Union flag hung out from the gallery----"

She looked up quickly; a pink flush stained her neck and forehead.

"I would not use that wicked flag to protect myse'f," she said quietly--"nor to save this house, either, Curt. It's only fo' you and Phil that I care what happens to anything now----"

"Then go North, you bad little rebel!" whispered her husband, drawing her into his arms. "Paige and Marye have been deserted long enough; and you've seen sufficient of this war--plenty to last your lifetime----"

"I saw Ailsa's house burn," she said slowly.

"Marye-mead. When?"

"This mo'ning, Curt. Phil thinks it was the shells from the gun-boats. It can't be he'ped now; it's gone. So is Edmund Ruffin's. And I wish I knew where that child, Ailsa, is. I'm that frightened and mise'ble, Curt----"

An orderly suddenly appeared at the door; her husband kissed her and hurried away. The outer door swung wide, letting in a brassy clangour of bugles and a roll of drums, which softened when the door closed with a snap.

It opened again abruptly, and a thin, gray-garbed figure came in, hesitated, and Celia turned, staring through her tears:

"Miss Lynden!" she exclaimed. "Is Ailsa here?"

Berkley sat up and leaned forward, looking at her intently from the mass of bandages.

"Letty!" he said, "where is Mrs. Paige?"

Celia had caught the girl's hands in hers, and was searching her thin white face with anxious eyes; and Letty shook her head and looked wonderingly at Berkley.

"Nothing has happened to her," she said. "A Sister of Mercy was wounded in the field hospital near Azalea, and they sent for Mrs. Paige to fill her place temporarily. And," looking from Celia to Berkley, "she is well and unhurt. The fighting is farther west now. Mrs. Paige heard yesterday that the 8th Lancers were encamped near Paigecourt and asked me to find Mr. Berkley--and deliver a

letter----"

She smiled, drew from her satchel a letter, and, disengaging her other hand from Celia's, went over to the bed and placed it in Berkley's hands.

"She is quite well," repeated Letty reassuringly; and, to Celia:

"She sends her love to you and to your husband and son, and wishes to know how they are and where their regiment is stationed."

"You sweet little thing!" said Celia, impulsively taking her into her arms and kissing her pale face. "My husband and my son are safe and well, thank God, and my cousin, Phil Berkley, is convalescent, and you may tell my sister-in-law that we all were worried most to death at not hearing from her. And now I'm going to get you a cup of broth--you poor little white-faced child! How did you ever get here?"

"Our ambulance brought me. We had sick men to send North. Ailsa couldn't leave, so she asked me to come."

She accepted a chair near the bed. Celia went away to prepare some breakfast with the aid of old Peter and Sadie, her maid. And as soon as she left the room Letty sprang to her feet and went straight to Berkley.

"I did not tell the entire truth," she said in a low, excited voice. "I heard your regiment was here; Ailsa learned it from me. I was coming anyway to see you."

"To see me, Letty?" he repeated, surprised and smiling.

"Yes," she said, losing what little colour remained in her cheeks.

"I am in--in much--anxiety--to know--what to do."

"Can _I_ help you?"

She looked wistfully at him; the tears rushed into her eyes; she dropped on her knees at his bedside and hid her face on his hands.

[Illustration: "She dropped on her knees at his bedside and hid her face on his hands."]

"Letty--Letty!" he said in astonishment, "what on earth has happened?"

She looked up, lips quivering, striving to meet his gaze through her tears.

"Dr. Benton is here. . . . He--he has asked me to--marry him."

Berkley lay silent, watching her intently.

"Oh, I know--I know," she sobbed. "I can't, can I? I should have to tell him--and he would never speak to me again--never write to me--never be what he has been all these months!--I know I cannot marry him. I came to tell you--to ask--but it's no use--no use. I knew what you would say----"

"Letty! Wait a moment----"

She rose, controlling herself with a desperate effort.

"Forgive me, Mr. Berkley; I didn't mean to break down; but I'm so tired--and--I wanted you--I needed to hear you tell me what was right. . . . But I knew already. Even if I were--were treacherous enough to marry him--I know he would find me out. . . . I can't get away from it--I can't seem to get away. Yesterday, in camp, the 20th Cavalry halted--and there was John Casson!--And I nearly dropped dead beside Dr. Benton--oh the punishment for what I did!--the awful punishment!--and Casson stared at me and said: 'My Lord, Letty! is that you?'"

She buried her burning cheeks in her hands.

"I did not lie to him. I offered him my hand; and perhaps he saw the agony in my face, for he didn't say anything about the Canterbury, but he took off his forage cap and was pleasant and kind. And he and Dr. Benton spoke to each other until the bugles sounded for the regiment to mount."

She flung her slender arm out in a tragic gesture toward the horizon. "The world is not wide enough to hide in," she said in a heart-breaking voice. "I thought it was--but there is no shelter--no place--no place in all the earth!"

"Letty," he said slowly, "if your Dr. Benton is the man I think he is--and I once knew him well enough to judge--he is the only man on earth fit to hear the confession you have made this day to me."

She looked at him, bewildered.

"I advise you to love him and marry him. Tell him about yourself if you choose; or don't tell him. There is a vast amount of nonsense talked about the moral necessity of turning one's self inside out the moment one comes to marry. Let me tell you, few men can do it; and their fiancées survive the shock. So, few men are asses enough to try it. As for women, few have any confessions to

make. A few have. You are one."

"Yes," she whispered.

"But I wouldn't if I were you. If ever any man or woman took the chance of salvation and made the most of it, that person is you! And I'm going to tell you that I wouldn't hesitate to marry you if I loved you."

"W-what!"

He laughed. "Not one second! It's a good partnership for any plan. Don't be afraid that you can't meet men on their own level. You're above most of us now; and you're mounting steadily. There, that's my opinion of you--that you're a good woman, and a charming one; and Benton is devilish lucky to get you. . . . Come here, Letty."

She went to him as though dazed; and he took both her hands in his.

"Don't you know," he said, "that I have seen you, day after day, intimately associated with the woman I love? Can you understand now that I am telling the truth when I say, let the past bury its ghosts; and go on living as you have lived from the moment that your chance came to live nobly. I know what you have made of

yourself. I know what the chances were against you. You are a better woman to-day than many who will die untempted. And you shall not doubt it, Letty. What a soul is born into is often fine and noble; what a soul makes of itself is beyond all praise.

"Choose your own way; tell him or not; but if you love him, give yourself to him. Whether or not you tell him, he will want you--as I would--as any man would. . . . Now you must smile at me, Letty."

She turned toward him a face, pallid, enraptured, transfigured with an inward radiance that left him silent--graver after that swift glimpse of a soul exalted.

She said slowly: "You and Ailsa have been God's own messengers to me. . . . I shall tell Dr. Benton. . . . If he still wishes it, I will marry him. It will be for him to ask--after he knows all."

Celia entered, carrying the breakfast on a tray.

"Curt's Zouaves have stolen ev'y pig, but I found bacon and po'k in the cellar," she said, smilingly. "Oh, dear! the flo' is in such a mess of plaster! Will you sit on the aidge of the bed, Miss Lynden, and he'p my cousin eat this hot co'n pone?"

So the napkin was spread over the sheets, and pillows tucked behind

Berkley; and Celia and Letty fed him, and Letty drank her coffee and thankfully ate her bacon and corn pone, telling them both, between bites, how it had been with her and with Ailsa since the great retreat set in, swamping all hospitals with the sick and wounded of an unbeaten but disheartened army, now doomed to decimation by disease.

"It was dreadful," she said. "We could hear the firing for miles and miles, and nobody knew what was happening. But all the northern papers said it was one great victory after another, and we believed them. All the regimental bands at the Landing played; and everybody was so excited. We all expected to hear that our army was in Richmond."

Celia reddened to the ears, and her lips tightened, but she said nothing; and Letty went on, unconscious of the fiery emotions awaking in Celia's breast:

"Everybody was so cheerful and happy in the hospital--all those poor sick soldiers," she said, "and everybody was beginning to plan to go home, thinking the war had nearly ended. I thought so, too, and I was so glad. And then, somehow, people began to get uneasy; and the first stragglers appeared. . . . Oh, it did seem incredible at first; we wouldn't believe that the siege of Richmond had been abandoned."

She smiled drearily. "I've found out that it is very easy to believe what you want to believe in this world. . . . Will you have some more broth, Mr. Berkley?"

Before he could answer the door opened and a red zouave came in, carrying his rifle and knapsack.

"Mother," he said in an awed voice, "Jimmy Lent is dead!"

"What!"

He looked stupidly around the room, resting his eyes on Letty and Berkley, then dropped heavily onto a chair.

"Jim's dead," he repeated vacantly. "He only arrived here yesterday--transferred from his militia to McDunn's battery. And now he's dead. Some one had better write to Camilla. I'm afraid to. . . . A shell hit him last night--oh--he's all torn to pieces--and Major Lent doesn't know it, either. . . . Father let me come; we're ordered across the river; good-bye, mother--" He rose and put his arms around her.

"You'll write to Camilla, won't you?" he said. "Tell her I love her. I didn't know it until just a few minutes ago. But I do,

mother. I'd like to marry her. Tell her not to cry too much.

Jimmy was playing cards, they say, and a big shell fell inside the redoubt. Philip--I think you knew Harry Sayre? Transferred from the 7th to the Zouaves as lieutenant in the 5th company?"

"Yes. Was he killed?"

"Oh, Lord, yes; everybody in the shebang except Arthur Wye was all torn to pieces. Tommy Atherton, too; you knew him, of course--5th Zouaves. He happened in--just visiting Arthur Wye. They were all playing cards in a half finished bomb-proof. . . . Mother, you _will_ write to Camilla, won't you, dear? Good-bye--good-bye, Phil--and Miss Lynden!" He caught his mother in his arms for a last hug, wrenched himself free, and ran back across the hall, bayonet and canteen clanking.

"Oh, why are they sending Curt's regiment across the river?" wailed Celia, following to the window. "Look at them, Phil! Can you see? The road is full of Zouaves--there's a whole regiment of them in blue, too. The batteries are all harnessed up; do you think there's going to be another battle? I don't know why they want to fight any mo'!" she exclaimed in sudden wrath and anguish. "I don't understand why they are not willing to leave the South alone. My husband will be killed, and my only son--like Jimmy Lent--if they don't ever stop this wicked fighting----"

The roar of a heavy gun buried the room in plaster dust. Letty calmly lifted the tray from the bed and set it on a table. Then very sweetly and with absolute composure she took leave of Celia and of Berkley. They saw her climb into an ambulance which was drawn up on the grass.

Then Berkley opened the letter that Letty had brought him:

"This is just a hurried line to ask you a few questions. Do you know a soldier named Arthur Wye? He is serving now as artilleryman in the 10th N. Y. Flying Battery, Captain McDunn. Are you acquainted with a lieutenant in the 5th Zouaves, named Cortlandt? I believe he is known to his intimates as Billy or 'Pop' Cortlandt. Are they trustworthy and reliable men? Where did you meet Miss Lynden and how long have you known her? Please answer immediately.

"AILSA PAIGE."

Wondering, vaguely uneasy, he read and re-read this note, so unlike Ailsa, so brief, so disturbing in its direct coupling of the people in whose company he had first met Letty Lynden. . . . Yet, on reflection, he dismissed apprehension, Ailsa was too fine a character to permit any change in her manner to humiliate Letty even if, by hazard, knowledge of the unhappy past had come to her concerning the pretty, pallid nurse of Sainte Ursula.

As for Arthur Wye and Billy Cortlandt, they were incapable of anything contemptible or malicious.

He asked Celia for a pencil and paper, and, propped on his pillows, he wrote:

"My darling, I don't exactly understand your message, but I guess it's all right. To answer it:

"Billy Cortlandt and Arthur Wye are old New York friends of mine. Their words are better than other people's bonds. Letty Lynden is a sweet, charming girl. I regret that I have not known her years longer than I have. I am sending this in haste to catch Letty's ambulance just departing, though still blocked by artillery passing the main road. Can you come? I love you.

"PHILIP BERKLEY."

Celia sent her coloured man running after the ambulance. He caught it just as it started on. Berkley, from his window, saw the servant deliver his note to Letty.

He had not answered the two questions concerning Letty. He could

not. So he had evaded them.

Preoccupied, still conscious of the lingering sense of uneasiness, he turned on his pillows and looked out of the window.

An enormous cloud of white smoke rose curling from the river, another, another; and boom! boom! boom! came the solid thunder of cannon. The gunboats at the Landing were opening fire; cavalry were leading their horses aboard transports; and far down the road the sun glistened on a long column of scarlet, where the 3rd Zouaves were marching to their boats.

The sharpshooters had already begun to trouble them. Their officers ordered them to lie down while awaiting their turn to embark. After a while many of the men sat up on the ground to stretch and look about them, Stephen among the others. And a moment later a conoidal bullet struck him square in the chest and knocked him flat in the dirt among his comrades.

CHAPTER XVII

The smoke and spiteful crackle of the pickets' fusilade had risen to one unbroken crash, solidly accented by the report of field guns.

Ambulances were everywhere driving to the rear at a gallop past the

centre and left sections of McDunn's Battery, which, unlimbered, was standing in a cotton field, the guns pointed southward across the smoke rising below.

Claymore's staff, dismounted, stood near. The young general himself, jacket over one arm, was seated astride the trail of the sixth gun talking eagerly to McDunn, when across the rolling ground came a lancer at full speed, plunging and bucketing in his saddle, the scarlet rags of the lance pennon whipping the wind. The trooper reined in his excited horse beside Claymore, saluted, and handed him a message; and the youthful general, glancing at it, got onto his feet in a hurry, and tossed his yellow-edged jacket of a private to an orderly. Then he faced the lancer:

"Tell Colonel Craig to hold his position no matter what it costs!" he exclaimed sharply. "Tell Colonel Arran that I expect him to stand by the right section of the 10th battery until it is safely and properly brought off!" He swung around on Captain McDunn.

"Limber your battery to the rear, sir! Follow headquarters!" he snapped, and threw himself into his saddle, giving his mount rein and heel with a reckless nod to his staff.

McDunn, superbly mounted, scarcely raised his clear, penetrating voice: "Cannoneers mount gun-carriages; caissons follow; drivers, put spur and whip to horses--forward--march!" he said.

"Trot out!" rang the bugles; the horses broke into a swinging lope across the dry ridges of the cotton field, whips whistled, the cannoneers bounced about on the chests, guns, limbers and caissons thumped, leaped, jolted, rose up, all wheels in the air at once, swayed almost to overturning, and thundered on in a tornado of dust, leaders, swing team, wheel team straining into a frantic gallop.

The powerful horses bounded forward into a magnificent stride; general and staff tore on ahead toward the turnpike. Suddenly, right past them came a driving storm of stampeding cavalry, panic-stricken, riding like damned men, tearing off and hurling from them carbines, canteens, belts; and McDunn, white with rage, whipped out his revolver and fired into them as they rushed by in a torrent of red dust. From his distorted mouth vile epithets poured; he cursed and damned their cowardice, and, standing up in his stirrups, riding like a cossack at full speed, attempted to use his sabre on the fugitives from the front. But there was no stopping them, for the poor fellows had been sent into fire ignorant how to use the carbines issued the day before.

Into a sandy field all spouting with exploding shells and bullets the drivers galloped and steered the plunging guns. The driver of the lead team, fifth caisson, was shot clear out of his saddle, all the wheels going over him and grinding him to pulp; piece and

limber whirled into a lane on a dead run, and Arthur Wye, driving the swing team, clinging to the harness and crawling out along the traces, gained the saddle of the lead-horse.

"Bully for you!" shouted McDunn. "I hope to God that cowardly monkey cavalry saw you!"

The left section swung on the centre to get its position; limber after limber dashed up, clashing and clanking, to drop its gun; caisson after caisson rounded to under partial cover in the farm lane to the right.

The roar of the conflict along the river had become terrific; to the east a New Jersey battery, obscured in flame-shot clouds, was retiring by its twenty-eight-foot prolonges, using cannister; the remains of a New Hampshire infantry regiment supported the retreat; between the two batteries Claymore in his shirt, sleeves rolled to his elbows, heavy revolver swinging in his blackened fist, was giving a tongue lashing to the stream of fugitives from the river woods.

"Where are you going! Hey! Scouting? Well scout to the front, damn you! . . . Where are you going, young man? For ammunition? Go back to the front or I'll shoot you! Get along there you malingersers! or, by God, I'll have a squadron of Arran's pig-stickers ride you down and punch your skins full of holes!

Orderly! Ask Colonel Arran if he can spare me a squad of his lancers for a few minutes----"

The orderly saluted, coughed up a stream of blood, fell backward off his horse, scrambled to his feet, terror-stricken, both hands pressed convulsively over his stomach!

"Damn them! They've got me. General!" he gasped--"they've g-got me this time! There's a piece of shell inside me as big----"

He leaned weakly against his mild-eyed horse, nauseated; but it was only a spent ball on his belt plate after all, and a few moments later, swaying and sickly, he forced his horse into a trot across the hill.

A major of Claymore's staff galloped with orders to the Zouaves; but, as he opened his mouth to speak a shell burst behind him, and he pitched forward on his face, his shattered arm doubling under him.

"Drag me behind that tree. Colonel Craig!" he said coolly. "I'll finish my orders in a moment." Major Lent and Colonel Craig got him behind the tree; and the officer's superb will never faltered.

"Your new position must cover that bridge," he whispered faintly.

"The left section of McDunn's battery is already ordered to your support. . . . How is it with you, Colonel? Speak louder----"

Colonel Craig, pallid and worn under the powder smears and sweat, wiped the glistening grime from his eye-glasses.

"We are holding on," he said. "It's all right, Major. I'll get word through to the General," and he signalled to some drummer boys lying quietly in the bushes to bring up a stretcher, just as the left section of McDunn's battery burst into view on a dead run, swung into action, and began to pour level sheets of flame into the woods, where, already, the high-pitched rebel yell was beginning again.

A solid shot struck No. 5 gun on the hub, killing Cannoneer No. 2, who was thumbing the vent, and filling No. 1 gunner with splinters of iron, whirling him into eternity amid a fountain of dirt and flying hub-tires. Then a shell blew a gun-team into fragments, plastering the men's faces with bloody shreds of flesh; and the boyish lieutenant, spitting out filth, coolly ordered up the limbers, and brought his section around into the road with a beautiful display of driving and horsemanship that drew raucous cheers from the Zouaves, where they lay, half stifled, firing at the gray line of battle gathering along the edges of the woods.

And now the shrill, startling battle cry swelled to the hysterical

pack yell, and, gathering depth and volume, burst out into a frantic treble roar. A long gray line detached itself from the woods; mounted officers, sashed and debonaire, trotted jauntily out in front of it; the beautiful battle flags slanted forward; there came a superb, long, low-swinging gleam of steel; and the Southland was afoot once more, gallant, magnificent, sweeping recklessly on into the red gloom of the Northern guns.

Berkley, his face bandaged, covered with sweat and dust, sat his worn, cowhide saddle in the ranks, long lance couched, watching, expectant. Every trooper who could ride a horse was needed now; hospitals had given up their invalids; convalescents and sick men gathered bridle with shaking fingers; hollow-eyed youngsters tightened the cheek-straps of their forage caps and waited, lance in rest.

In the furious smoke below them they could see the Zouaves running about like red devils in the pit; McDunn's guns continued to pour solid columns of flame across the creek; far away to the west the unseen Union line of battle had buried itself in smoke. Through it the Southern battle flags still advanced, halted, tossed wildly, moved forward in jerks, swung to the fierce cheering, moved on haltingly, went down, up again, wavered, disappeared in the cannon fog.

Colonel Arran, his naked sabre point lowered, sat his saddle, gray

and erect. The Major never stirred in his saddle; only the troop captains from time to time turned their heads as some stricken horse lashed out, or the unmistakable sound of a bullet hitting living flesh broke the intense silence of the ranks.

Hallam, at the head of his troop, stroked his handsome moustache continually, and at moments spoke angrily to his restive horse. He was beginning to have a good deal of trouble with his horse, which apparently wished to bolt, and he had just managed to drag the fretting animal back into position, when, without warning, the volunteer infantry posted on the right delivered a ragged volley, sagged back, broke, and began running. Almost on their very heels a dust-covered Confederate flying battery dropped its blackened guns and sent charge after charge ripping through them, while out of the fringing woods trotted the gray infantry, driving in skirmishers, leaping fences, brush piles, and ditches, like lean hounds on the trail.

Instantly a squadron of the Lancers trampled forward, facing to the west; but down on their unprotected flank thundered the Confederate cavalry, and from the beginning it had been too late for a counter-charge.

A whirlwind of lancers and gray riders drove madly down the slope, inextricably mixed, shooting, sabering, stabbing with tip and ferrule.

A sabre stroke severed Berkley's cheek-strap, sheering through visor and button; and he swung his lance and drove it backward into a man's face.

In the terrible confusion and tangle of men and horses he could scarcely use his lance at all, or avoid the twirling lances of his comrades, or understand what his officers were shouting. It was all a nightmare--a horror of snorting horses, panting, sweating riders, the swift downward glitter of sabre strokes, thickening like sheeted rain.

His horse's feet were now entangled in brush heaps; a crowding, cursing mass of cavalymen floundered into a half demolished snake fence, which fell outward, rolling mounts and riders into a wet gully, where they continued fighting like wild cats in a pit.

Yelling exultantly, the bulk of Confederate riders passed through the Lancers, leaving them to the infantry to finish, and rode at the flying Federal infantry. Everywhere bayonets began to glimmer through the smoke and dust, as the disorganised squadrons rallied and galloped eastward, seeking vainly for shelter to reform.

Down in the hollow an entire troop of Lancers, fairly intact, had become entangled among the brush and young saplings, and the

Confederate infantry, springing over the fence, began to bayonet them and pull them from their horses, while the half-stunned cavalymen scattered through the bushes, riding hither and thither looking vainly for some road to lead them out of the bushy trap. They could not go back; the fence was too solid to ride down, too high to leap; the carbineers faced about, trying to make a stand, firing from their saddles; Colonel Arran, confused but cool, turned his brier-torn horse and rode forward, swinging his heavy sabre, just as Hallam and Berkley galloped up through the bushes, followed by forty or more bewildered troopers, and halted fo'r orders. But there was no way out.

Then Berkley leaned from his saddle, touched the visor of his cap, and, looking Arran straight in the eyes, said quietly:

"With your permission, sir, I think I can tear down enough of that fence to let you and the others through! May I try?"

Colonel Arran said, quietly: "No man can ride to that fence and live. Their infantry hold it."

"Two men may get there." He turned and looked at Hallam. "We're not going to surrender; we'll all die here anyway. Shall we try the fence together?"

For a second the silence resounded with the racket of the Confederate rifles; three men dropped from their saddles; then Hallam turned ghastly white, opened his jaws to speak; but no sound came. Suddenly he swung his horse, and spurred straight toward the open brush in the rear, whipping out his handkerchief and holding it fluttering above his head.

Colonel Arran shouted at him, jerked his revolver free, and fired at him. A carbineer also fired after him from the saddle, but Hallam rode on unscathed in his half-crazed night, leaving his deserted men gazing after him, astounded. In the smoke of another volley, two more cavalrymen pitched out of their saddles.

Then Berkley drove his horse blindly into the powder fog ahead; a dozen brilliant little jets of flame pricked the gloom; his horse reared, and went down in a piteous heap, but Berkley landed on all fours, crawled hurriedly up under the smoke, jerked a board loose, tore another free, rose to his knees and ripped away board after board, shouting to his comrades to come on and cut their way out.

They came, cheering, spurring their jaded horses through the gap, crowding out across the road, striking wildly with their sabres, forcing their way up the bank, into a stubble field, and forward at a stiff trot toward the swirling smoke of a Union battery behind which they could see shattered squadrons reforming.

Berkley ran with them on foot, one hand grasping a friendly stirrup, until the horse he clung to halted abruptly, quivering all over; then sank down by the buttocks with a shuddering scream. And Berkley saw Colonel Arran rising from the ground, saw him glance at his horse, turn and look behind him where the Confederate skirmishers were following on a run, kneeling to fire occasionally, then springing to their feet and trotting forward, rifles glittering in the sun.

A horse with an empty saddle, its off foreleg entangled in its bridle, was hobbling around in circles, stumbling, neighing, tripping, scrambling to its feet again, and trying frantically to go on. Berkley caught the bridle, freed it, and hanging to the terrified animal's head, shouted to Colonel Arran:

"You had better hurry, sir. Their skirmishers are coming up fast!"

Colonel Arran stood quietly gazing at him. Suddenly he reeled and stumbled forward against the horse's flank, catching at the mane.

"Are you badly hurt, sir?"

The Colonel turned his dazed eyes on him, then slid forward along the horse's flank. His hands relaxed their hold on the mane, and he fell flat on his face; and, Berkley, still hanging to the bit,

dragged the prostrate man over on his back and stared into his deathly features.

"Where did they hit you, sir?"

"Through the liver," he gasped. "It's all right, Berkley. . . .

Don't wait any longer-----"

"I'm not going to leave you."

"You must . . . I'm ended. . . . You haven't a--moment--to

lose-----"

"Can you put your arms around my neck?"

"There's no time to waste! I tell you to mount and run for

it! . . . And--thank you-----"

"Put both arms around my neck. . . . Quick! . . . Can you lock your fingers? . . . This damned horse won't stand! Hold fast to me. I'll raise you easily. . . . Get the other leg over the saddle. Lean forward. Now I'll walk him at first--hold tight! . . . Can you hang on, Colonel?"

"Yes--_my son_"

A wild thrill ran through the boy's veins, stopping breath and pulse for a second. Then the hot blood rushed stinging into his face; he threw one arm around the drooping figure in the saddle, and, controlling the bridle with a grip of steel, started the horse off across the field.

All around them the dry soil was bursting into little dusty fountains where the bullets were striking; ahead, dark smoke hung heavily. Farther on some blue-capped soldiers shouted to them from their shallow rifle pits.

Farther on still they passed an entire battalion of regular infantry, calmly seated on the grass in line of battle; and behind these troops Berkley saw a stretcher on the grass and two men of the hospital corps squatted beside it, chewing grass stems.

They came readily enough when they learned the name and rank of the wounded officer. Berkley, almost exhausted, walked beside the stretcher, leading the horse and looking down at the stricken man who lay with eyes closed and clothing disordered where a hasty search for the wound had disclosed the small round blue hole just over the seat of the liver.

They turned into a road which had been terribly cut up by the wheels of artillery. It was already thronged with the debris of the battle, skulkers, wounded men hobbling, pallid malingerers edging their furtive way out of fire. Then ahead arose a terrible clamour, the wailing of wounded, frightened cries, the angry shouts of cavalymen, where a Provost Guard of the 20th Dragoons was riding, recklessly into the fugitives, roughly sorting the goats from the sheep, and keeping the way clear for the ambulances now arriving along a cross-road at a gallop.

Berkley heard his name called out, and, looking up, saw Casson, astride a huge horse, signalling him eagerly from his saddle.

"Who in hell have you got there?" he asked, pushing his horse up to the litter. "By God, it's Colonel Arran," he added in a modified voice. "Is he very bad, Berkley?"

"I don't know. Can't you stop one of those ambulances, Jack? I want to get him to the surgeons as soon as possible----"

"You bet!" said Casson, wheeling his horse and displaying the new chevrons of a sergeant. "Hey, you black offspring of a yellow whippet!" he bellowed to a driver, "back out there and be damn quick about it!" And he leaned from his saddle, and seizing the leaders by the head, swung them around with a volley of profanity.

Then, grinning amiably at Berkley, he motioned the stretcher bearers forward and sat on his horse, garrulously superintending the transfer of the injured man.

"There's an emergency hospital just beyond that clump of trees," he said. "You'd better take him there. Golly! but he's hard hit. I guess that bullet found its billet. There's not much hope when it's a belly-whopper. Too bad, ain't it? He was a bully old boy of a colonel; we all said so in the dragoons. Only--to hell with those lances of yours, Berkley! What cursed good are they alongside a gun? And I notice your regiment has its carbineers, too--which proves that your lances are no good or you wouldn't have twelve carbines to the troop. Eh? Oh, you bet your boots, sonny. Don't talk lance to me! It's all on account of those Frenchmen on Little Mac's staff----"

"For God's sake shut up!" said Berkley nervously. "I can't stand any more just now."

"Oh!" said Casson, taken aback, "I didn't know you were such cronies with your Colonel. Sorry, my dear fellow; didn't mean to seem indifferent. Poor old gentleman. I guess he will pull through. There are nurses at the front--nice little things. God bless 'em! Say, don't you want to climb up with the driver?"

Berkley hesitated. "Do you know where my regiment is? I ought to

go back--if there's anybody to look after Colonel Arran----"

"Is that your horse?"

"No--some staff officer's, I guess."

"Where's yours?"

"Dead," said Berkley briefly. He thought a moment, then tied his horse to the tail-board and climbed up beside the driver.

"Go on," he said; "drive carefully", and he nodded his thanks to Casson as the team swung north.

The Provost Guard, filing along, carbines on thigh, opened to let him through; and he saw them turning in their saddles to peer curiously into the straw as the ambulance passed.

It was slow going, for the road was blocked with artillery and infantry and other ambulances, but the driver found a lane between guns and caissons and through the dusty blue columns plodding forward toward the firing line; and at last a white hospital tent glimmered under the trees, and the slow mule team turned into a leafy lane and halted in the rear of a line of ambulances which

were all busily discharging their mangled burdens. The cries of the wounded were terrible.

Operating tables stood under the trees in the open air; assistants sponged the blood from them continually; the overworked surgeons, stripped to their undershirts, smeared with blood, worked coolly and rapidly in the shade of the oak-trees, seldom raising their voices, never impatient. Orderlies brought water in artillery buckets; ward-masters passed swiftly to and fro; a soldier stood by a pile of severed limbs passing out bandages to assistants who swarmed around, scurrying hither and thither under the quiet orders of the medical directors.

A stretcher was brought; Colonel Arran opened his heavy lids as they placed him in it. His eyes summoned Berkley.

"It's all right," he said in the ghost of a voice. "Whichever way it turns out, it's all right. . . I've tried to live lawfully. . . . It is better to live mercifully. I think--she--would forgive. . . . Will you?"

"Yes."

He bent and took the wounded man's hand, in his.

"If I knew--if I _knew_--" he said, and his burning eyes searched the bloodless face beneath him.

"God?" he whispered--"if it were true----"

A surgeon shouldered him aside, glanced sharply at the patient, motioned the bearers forward.

Berkley sat down by the roadside, bridle in hand, head bowed in his arms. Beside him his horse fed quietly on the weeds. In his ears rang the cries of the wounded; all around him he was conscious of people passing to and fro; and he sat there, face covered, deadly tired, already exhausted to a stolidity that verged on stupor.

He must have slept, too, because when he sat up and opened his eyes again it was nearly sundown, and somebody had stolen his horse.

A zouave with a badly sprained ankle, lying on a blanket near him, offered him bread and meat that stank; and Berkley ate it, striving to collect his deadened thoughts. After he had eaten he filled the zouave's canteen at a little rivulet where hundreds of soldiers were kneeling to drink or dip up the cool, clear water.

"What's your reg'ment, friend?" asked the man.

"Eighth New York Lancers."

"Lord A'mighty! You boys did get cut up some, didn't you?"

"I guess so. Are you Colonel Craig's regiment?"

"Yes. We got it, too. Holy Mother--we got it f'r fair!"

"Is your Colonel all right?"

"Yes. Steve--his son--corporal, 10th Company--was hit."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. Plumb through the collar-bone. He was one of the first to get it. I was turrible sorry for his father--fine old boy!--and he looked like he'd drop dead hisself--but, by gosh, friend, when the stretcher took Steve to the rear the old man jest sot them clean-cut jaws o' his'n, an' kep' his gold-wired gig-lamps to the front. An' when the time come, he sez in his ca'm, pleasant way: 'Boys,' sez he, 'we're agoin' in. It's a part of the job,' sez he, 'that has got to be done thorough. So,' sez he, 'we'll jest mosey along kind o' quick steppin' now, and we'll do our part like we

al'us does do it. For'rd--mar-r-rch!"

Berkley sat still, hands clasped over his knees, thinking of Stephen, and of Celia, and of the father out yonder somewhere amid the smoke.

"Gawd," said the zouave, "you got a dirty jab on your cocanut, didn't you?"

The bandage had slipped, displaying the black scab of the scarcely healed wound; and Berkley absently replaced it.

"That'll ketch the girls," observed the zouave with conviction.

"Damn it, I've only got a sprained ankle to show my girl."

"The war's not over," said Berkley indifferently. Then he got up, painfully, from the grass, exchanged adieux with the zouave, and wandered off toward the hospital to seek for news of Colonel Arran.

It appeared that the surgeons had operated, and had sent the Colonel a mile farther to the rear, where a temporary hospital had been established in a young ladies' seminary. And toward this Berkley set out across the fields, the sound of the battle dinning heavily in his aching ears.

As he walked he kept a sullen eye out for his stolen horse, never expecting to see him, and it was with a savage mixture of surprise and satisfaction that he beheld him, bestridden by two dirty malingers from a New York infantry regiment who rode on the snaffle with difficulty and objurgations and reproached each other for their mutual discomfort.

How they had escaped the Provost he did not know; how they escaped absolute annihilation they did not comprehend; for Berkley seized the bridle, swung the horse sharply, turning them both out of the saddle; then, delivering a swift kick apiece, as they lay cursing, he mounted and rode forward amid enthusiastic approval from the drivers of passing army waggons.

Long since the towering smoke in the west had veiled the sun; and now the sky had become gray and thick, and already a fine drizzling rain was falling, turning the red dust to grease.

Slipping, floundering, his horse bore him on under darkening skies; rain fell heavily now; he bared his hot head to it; raised his face, masked with grime, and let the drops fall on the dark scar that burned under the shifting bandage.

In the gathering gloom eastward he saw the horizon redden and darken and redden with the cannon flashes; the immense battle

rumour filled his ears and brain, throbbing, throbbing.

"Which way, friend?" demanded a patrol, carelessly throwing his horse across Berkley's path.

"Orderly to Colonel Arran, 8th New York Lancers, wounded. Is that the hospital, yonder?"

"Them school buildin's," nodded the patrol. "Say, is your colonel very bad? I'm 20th New York, doin' provost. We seen you fellers at White Oak. Jesus! what a wallop they did give us----"

He broke off grimly, turned his horse, and rode out into a soggy field where some men were dodging behind a row of shaggy hedge bushes. And far behind Berkley heard his loud, bullying voice:

"Git! you duck-legged, egg-suckin', skunk-backed loafers! Go on, there! Aw, don't yer talk back to me 'r I'll let m' horse bite yer pants off! Back yer go! Forrard! Hump! Hump! Scoot!"

Through the heavily falling rain he saw the lighted school buildings looming among the trees; turned into the drive, accounted for himself, gave his horse to a negro with orders to care for it, and followed a ward-master into an open-faced shed where a kettle was boiling over a sheet-iron stove.

The ward-master returned presently, threading his way through a mass of parked ambulances to the shed where Berkley sat on a broken cracker box.

"Colonel Arran is very low. I guess you'd better not bother him to-night."

"Is he--mortally hurt?"

"I've seen worse."

"He may get well?"

"I've seen 'em get well," said the non-committal ward-master.

Then, looking Berkley over: "You're pretty dirty, ain't you? Are you--" he raised his eyebrows significantly.

"I'm clean," said Berkley with the indifference habituated to filth.

"All right. They'll fix you up a cot somewhere. If Colonel Arran comes out all right I'll call you. He's full of opium now."

"Did they get the bullet?"

"Oh, yes. I ain't a surgeon, my friend, but I hear a lot of surgeon talk. It's the shock--in a man of his age. The wound's clean, so far--not a thread in it, I hear. Shock--and gangrene--that's what we look out for. . . . What's the news down by the river?"

"I don't know," said Berkley.

"Don't you know if you got licked?"

"I don't think we did. You'd hear the firing out here much plainer."

"You're the 8th Cavalry, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"They say you got cut up."

"Some."

"And how about the Zouaves?"

"Oh, they're there yet," said Berkley listlessly. Fatigue was overpowering him; he was aware, presently, that a negro, carrying a lantern, was guiding his stumbling steps into a small building where, amid piles of boxes, an army cot stood covered by a blanket. Berkley gave him a crumpled mess of paper money, and he almost expired.

Later the same negro rolled a wooden tub into the room, half filled it with steaming water, and stood in profound admiration of his work, grinning at Berkley.

"Is you-all gwine bresh up, suh?" he inquired.

Berkley straightened his shoulders with an effort, unbuckled his belt, and slowly began to take off his wet uniform.

The negro aided him respectfully; that wet wad of dollars had done its work profoundly.

"Yo' is de adjetant ob dis here Gin'ral ob de Lancers, suh? De po' ole Gin'ral! He done git shot dreffle bad, suh. . . . Jess you lay on de flo', suh, t'will I gits yo' boots off'n yo' laigs! Dar! Now jess set down in de tub, suh. I gwine scrub you wif de

saddle-soap--Lor', Gord-a-mighty! Who done bang you on de haid dat-a-way?"--scrubbing vigorously with the saddle-soap all the while. "Spec' you is lame an' so' all over, is you? Now I'se gwine rub you haid, suh; an' now I'se gwine dry you haid." He chuckled and rubbed and manipulated, yet became tender as a woman in drying the clipped hair and the scarred temple. And, before Berkley was aware of what he was about, the negro lifted him and laid him on the cot.

"Now," he chuckled, "I'se gwine shave you." And he fished out a razor from the rear pocket of his striped drill overalls, rubbed the weapon of his race with a proud thumb, spread more soap over Berkley's upturned face, and fell deftly to work, wiping off the accumulated lather on the seat of his own trousers.

Berkley remembered seeing him do it twice; then remembered no more.

A blessed sense of rest soothed every bone; in the heavenly stillness and surcease from noise he drifted gently into slumber, into a deep dreamless sleep.

The old negro looked at him, aged face wrinkled in compassion.

"Po' li'l sodger boy," he muttered. "Done gib me fo' dollahs.

Lor' Gor' a'mighty! Spec' Mars Linkum's men is all richer'n ole Miss."

He cast another glance at the sleeping man, then picked up the worn, muddy boots, threw the soiled jacket and breeches over his arm, and shuffled off, shaking his grizzled head.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was still dark when he awoke with a violent start, dreaming of loud trumpets, and found himself sitting upright on his cot, staring into obscurity.

Outside on the veranda a multitude of heavy steps echoed and re-echoed over the creaking boards; spurs clinked, sabres dragged and clanked; a man's harsh, nasal voice sounded irritably at intervals:

"We're not an army--we're not yet an army; that's what's the matter. You can't erect an army by uniforming and drilling a few hundred thousand clerks and farmers. You can't manufacture an army by brigading regiments--by creating divisions and forming army corps. There is only one thing on God's long-enduring earth that can transform this mob of State troops into a National army--discipline!--and that takes time; and we've got to take it and let experience kick us out of one battle into another. And some day we'll wake up to find ourselves a real army, with real departments, really controlled and in actual and practical working

order. Now it's every department for itself and God help General McClellan! He has my sympathy! He has a dirty job on his hands half done, and they won't let him finish it!"

And again the same impatient voice broke out contemptuously:

"War? These two years haven't been two years of war! They've been two years of a noisy, gaudy, rough and tumble! Bull Run was _opera bouffe_! The rest of it has been one fantastic and bloody carnival! Did anybody ever before see such a grandmother's rag bag of uniforms in an American army! What in hell do we want of zouaves in French uniforms, cavalry, armed with Austrian lances, ridiculous rocket-batteries, Polish riders, Hungarian hussars, grenadiers, mounted rifles, militia and volunteers in every garb, carrying every arm ever created by foreign armourers and military tailors! . . . But I rather guess that the fancy-dress-ball era is just about over. I've a notion that we're coming down to the old-fashioned army blue again. And the sooner the better. I want no more red fezzes and breeches in my commands for the enemy to blaze at a mile away! I want no more picturesque lances. I want plain blue pants and Springfield rifles, by God! And I guess I'll get them, if I make noise enough in North America!"

Who this impassioned military critic was, shouting opinions to the sky, Berkley never learned; for presently there was a great jingling and clatter and trample of horses brought around, and the

officers, whoever they were, mounted and departed as they had arrived, in darkness, leaving Berkley on his cot in the storehouse to stretch his limbs, and yawn and stretch again, and draw the warm folds of the blanket closer, and lie blinking at the dark, through which, now, a bird had begun to twitter a sweet, fitful salute to the coming dawn.

Across the foot of his couch lay folded an invalid's red hospital wrapper; beside his bed stood the slippers. After a few moments he rose, stepped into the slippers, and, drawing on the woolen robe, belted it in about his thin waist. Then he limped out to the veranda.

In the dusk the bird sang timidly. Berkley could just make out the outlines of the nearer buildings, and of tall trees around. Here and there lights burned behind closed windows; but, except for these, the world was black and still; stiller for the deadened stamping of horses in distant unseen stalls.

An unmistakable taint of the hospital hung in the fresh morning air--a vague hint of anaesthetics, of cooking--the flat odour of sickness and open wounds.

Lanterns passed in the darkness toward the stables; unseen shapes moved hither and thither, their footsteps sharply audible. He listened and peered about him for a while, then went back to the

store-room, picked his way among the medical supplies, and sat down on the edge of his bed.

A few moments later he became aware of somebody moving on the veranda, and of a light outside; heard his door open, lifted his dazzled eyes in the candle rays.

"Are you here, Philip?" came a quiet, tired voice. "You must wake, now, and dress. Colonel Arran is conscious and wishes to see you."

"Ailsa! Good God!"

She stood looking at him placidly, the burning candle steady in her hand, her face very white and thin.

He had risen, standing there motionless in his belted invalid's robe with the stencilled S. C. on the shoulder. And now he would have gone to her, hands outstretched, haggard face joyously illumined; but she stepped back with a swift gesture that halted him; and in her calm, unfriendly gaze he hesitated, bewildered, doubting his senses.

"Ailsa, dear, is anything wrong?"

"I think," she said quietly, "that we had better not let Colonel Arran see how wrong matters have gone between us. He is very badly hurt. I have talked a little with him. I came here because he asked for you and for no other reason."

"Did you know I was here?"

"I saw you arrive last night--from the infirmary window. . . . I hope your wound is healed," she added in a strained voice.

"Ailsa! What has happened?"

She shuddered slightly, looked at, him without a shadow of expression.

"Let us understand one another now. I haven't the slightest atom of--regard--left for you. I have no desire to see you, to hear of you again while I am alive. That is final."

"Will you tell me why?"

She had turned to go; now she hesitated, silent, irresolute.

"Will you tell me, Ailsa?"

She said, wearily: "If you insist, I can make it plainer, some time. But this is not the time. . . And you had better not ask me at all, Philip."

"I do ask you."

"I warn you to accept your dismissal without seeking an explanation. It would spare--us both."

"I will spare neither of us. What has changed you?"

"I shall choose my own convenience to answer you," she replied haughtily.

"Choose it, then, and tell me when to expect your explanation."

"When I send for you; not before."

"Are you going to let me go away with that for my answer?"

"Perhaps."

He hooked his thumbs in his girdle and looked down, considering;

then, quietly raising his head:

"I don't know what you have found out--what has been told you. I have done plenty of things in my life unworthy of you, but I thought you knew that."

"I know it now."

"You knew it before. I never attempted to conceal anything."

A sudden blue glimmer made her eyes brilliant. "That is a falsehood!" she said deliberately. The colour faded from his cheeks, then he said with ashy composure:

"I lie much less than the average man, Ailsa. It is nothing to boast of, but it happens to be true. I don't lie."

"You keep silent and act a lie!"

He reflected for a moment; then:

"Hadn't you better tell me?"

"No."

Then his colour returned, surging, making the scar on his face hideous; he turned, walked to the window, and stood looking into the darkness while the departing glimmer of her candle faded on the wall behind him.

Presently, scraping, ducking, chuckling, the old darky appeared with his boots and uniform, everything dry and fairly clean; and he dressed by lantern light, buckled his belt, drew on his gloves, settled his forage cap, and followed the old man out into the graying dawn.

They gave him some fresh light bread and a basin of coffee; he finished and waited, teeth biting the stem of his empty pipe for which he had no tobacco.

Surgeons, assistant surgeons, contract physicians, ward-masters, nurses, passed and re-passed; stretchers filed into the dead house; coffins were being unloaded and piled under a shed; a constant stream of people entered and left the apothecary's office; the Division Medical Director's premises were besieged. Ambulances continually drove up or departed; files of sick and wounded, able to move without assistance, stood in line, patient, uncomplaining men, bloody, ragged, coughing, burning with fever, weakened for lack of nourishment; many crusted with filth and sometimes with

vermin, humbly awaiting the disposition of their battered,
half-dead bodies. . . .

The incipient stages of many diseases were plainly apparent among them. Man after man was placed on a stretcher, and hurried off to the contagious wards; some were turned away and directed to other hospitals, and they went without protest, dragging their gaunt legs, even attempting some feeble jest as they passed their wretched comrades whose turns had not yet come.

Presently a hospital servant came and took Berkley away to another building. The wards were where the schoolrooms had been. Blackboards still decorated the wall; a half-erased exercise in Latin remained plainly visible over the rows of cots.

Ailsa and the apothecary stood together in low-voiced conversation by a window. She merely raised her eyes when Berkley entered; then, without giving him a second glance, continued her conversation.

In the heavy, ether-laden atmosphere flies swarmed horribly, and men detailed as nurses from regimental companies were fanning them from helpless patients. A civilian physician, coming down the aisle, exchanged a few words with the ward-master and then turned to Berkley.

"You are trooper Ormond, orderly to Colonel Arran?"

"Yes."

"Colonel Arran desires you to remain here at his orders for the present."

"Is Colonel Arran likely to recover, doctor?"

"He is in no immediate danger."

"May I see him?"

"Certainly. He sent for you. Step this way."

They entered another and much smaller ward in which there were very few cots, and from which many of the flies had been driven.

Colonel Arran lay very white and still on his cot; only his eyes turned as Berkley came up and stood at salute.

"Sit down," he said feebly. And, after a long silence:

"Berkley, the world seems to be coming right. I am grateful that I--lie here--with you beside me."

Berkley's throat closed; he could not speak; nor did he know what he might have said could he have spoken, for within him all had seemed to crash softly into chaos, and he had no mind, no will, no vigour, only a confused understanding of emotion and pain, and a fierce longing.

Colonel Arran's sunken eyes never left his, watching, wistful, patient. And at last the boy bent forward and rested his elbows on his knees and dropped his face in both hands. Time ebbed away in silence; there was no sound in the ward save the blue flies' buzz or the slight movement of some wounded man easing his tortured body.

"Philip!"

The boy lifted his face from his hands.

"Can you forgive me?"

"Yes, I have. . . . There was only one thing to forgive. I don't count--myself."

"I count it--bitterly."

"You need not. . . . It was only--my mother----"

"I know, my boy. The blade of justice is double-edged. No mortal can wield it safely; only He who forged it. . . . I have never ceased to love--your mother."

Berkley's face became ashen.

Colonel Arran said: "Is there punishment more terrible than that for any man?"

Presently Berkley drew his chair closer.

"I wish you to know how mother died," he said simply. "It is your right to know. . . . Because, there will come a time when she and--you will be together again . . . if you believe such things."

"I believe."

For a while the murmur of Berkley's voice alone broke the silence.

Colonel Arran lay with eyes closed, a slight flush on his sunken cheeks; and, before long, Berkley's hand lay over his and remained there.

The brilliant, ominous flies whirled overhead or drove headlong against the window-panes, falling on their backs to kick and buzz and scramble over the sill; slippered attendants moved softly along the aisle with medicines; once the ward-master came and looked down at Colonel Arran, touched the skin of his face, his pulse, and walked noiselessly away. Berkley's story had already ended.

After a while he said: "If you will get well--whatever I am--we two men have in common a memory that can never die. If there were nothing else--God knows whether there is--that memory is enough, to make us live at peace with one another. . . . I do not entirely understand how it is with me, but I know that some things have been washed out of my heart--leaving little of the bitterness--nothing now of anger. It has all been too sad for such things--a tragedy too deep for the lesser passions to meddle with. . . . Let us forgive each other. . . . She will know it, somehow."

Their hands slowly closed together and remained.

"Philip!"

"Sir?"

"Ailsa is here."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you say to her that I would like to see her?"

For a moment Berkley hesitated, then rose quietly and walked into the adjoining ward.

Ailsa was bending over a sick man, fanning away the flies that clustered around the edge of the bowl from which he was drinking. And Berkley waited until the patient had finished the broth.

"Ailsa, may I speak to you a moment?"

She had been aware of his entrance, and was not startled. She handed the bowl and fan to an attendant, turned leisurely, and came out into the aisle.

"What is it?"

"Colonel Arran wishes to see you. Can you come?"

"Certainly."

She led the way; and as she walked he noticed that all the lithe grace, all the youth and spring to her step had vanished. She moved wearily; her body under the gray garb was thin; blue veins showed faintly in temple and wrist; only her superb hair and eyes had suffered no change.

Colonel Arran's eyes opened as she stooped at his bedside and laid her lips lightly on his forehead.

"Is there another chair?" he asked wearily.

Ailsa's glance just rested on Berkley, measuring him in expressionless disdain. Then, as he brought another chair, she seated herself.

"You, too, Philip," murmured the wounded man.

Ailsa's violet eyes opened in surprise at the implied intimacy between these men whom she had vaguely understood were anything but friends. But she remained coldly aloof, controlling even a shiver

of astonishment when Colonel Arran's hand, which held hers, groped also for Berkley's, and found it.

Then with an effort he turned his head and looked at them.

"I have long known that you loved each other," he whispered. "It is a happiness that God sends me as well as you. If it be His will that I--do not recover, this makes it easy for me. If He wills it that I live, then, in His infinite mercy, He also gives me the reason for living."

Icy cold, Ailsa's hand lay there, limply touching Berkley's; the sick man's eyes were upon them.

"Philip!"

"Sir?"

"My watch is hanging from a nail on the wall. There is a chamois bag hanging with it. Give--it--to me."

And when it lay in his hand he picked at the string, forced it open, drew out a key, and laid it in Berkley's hand with a faint smile.

"You remember, Philip?"

"Yes, sir."

The wounded man looked at Ailsa wistfully.

"It is the key to my house, dear. One day, please God, you and Philip will live there." . . . He closed his eyes, groping for both their hands, and retaining them, lay silent as though asleep.

Berkley's palm burned against hers; she never stirred, never moved a muscle, sitting there as though turned to stone. But when the wounded man's frail grasp relaxed, cautiously, silently, she freed her fingers, rose, looked down, listening to his breathing, then, without a glance at Berkley, moved quietly toward the door.

He was behind her a second later, and she turned to confront him in the corridor lighted by a single window.

"Will you tell me what has changed you?" he said.

"Something which that ghastly farce cannot influence!" she said, hot faced, eyes brilliant with anger. "I loved Colonel Arran

enough to endure it--endure your touch--which
shames--defiles--which--which outrages every instinct in me!"

Breathless, scornful, she drew back, still facing him.

"The part you have played in my life!" she said bitterly--"think it
over. Remember what you have been toward me from the first--a
living insult! And when you remember--all--remember that in spite
of _all_ I--I loved you--stood before you in the rags of my
pride--all that you had left me to clothe myself!--stood upright,
unashamed, and acknowledged that I loved you!"

She made a hopeless gesture.

"Oh, you had all there was of my heart! I gave it; I laid it
beside my pride, under your feet. God knows what madness was upon
me--and you had flung my innocence into my face! And you had held
me in your embrace, and looked me in the eyes, and said you would
not marry me. And I still loved you!"

Her hands flew to her breast, higher, clasped against the full,
white throat.

"Now, have I not dragged my very soul naked under your eyes? Have
I not confessed enough. What more do you want of me before you

consent to keep your distance and trouble me no more?"

"I want to know what has angered you against me," he said quietly.

She set her teeth and stared at him, with beautiful resolute eyes.

"Before I answer that," she said, "I demand to know why you refused to marry me."

"I cannot tell you, Ailsa."

In a white rage she whispered:

"No, you dare not tell me!--you coward! I had to learn the degrading reason from others!"

He grew deathly white, caught her arms in a grasp of steel, held her twisting wrists imprisoned.

"Do you know what you are saying?" he stammered.

"Yes, I know! Your cruelty--your shame----"

"Be silent!" he said between his teeth. "My shame is my pride! Do you understand!"

Outraged, quivering all over, she twisted out of his grasp.

"Then go to her!" she whispered. "Why don't you go to her?"

And, as his angry eyes became blank:

"Don't you understand? She is there--just across the road!" She flung open the window and pointed with shaking anger.

"Didn't anybody tell you she is there? Then I'll tell you. Now go to her! You are--worthy--of one another!"

"Of whom are you speaking--in God's name!" he breathed.

Panting, flushed, flat against the wall, she looked back out of eyes that had become dark and wide, fumbling in the bosom of her gray garb. And, just where the scarlet heart was stitched across her breast, she drew out a letter, and, her fascinated gaze still fixed on him, extended her arm.

He took the crumpled sheets from her in a dazed sort of way, but did not look at them.

"_Who_ is there--across the road?" he repeated stupidly.

"Ask--Miss--Lynden."

"Letty!"

But she suddenly turned and slipped swiftly past him, leaving him there in the corridor by the open window, holding the letter in his hand.

For a while he remained there, leaning against the wall. Sounds from the other ward came indistinctly--a stifled cry, a deep groan, the hurried tread of feet, the opening or closing of windows. Once a dreadful scream rang out from a neighbouring ward, where a man had suddenly gone insane; and he could hear the sounds of the struggle, the startled orders, the shrieks, the crash of a cot; then the dreadful uproar grew fainter, receding. He roused himself, passed an unsteady hand across his eyes, looked blindly at the letter, saw only a white blurr, and, crushing it in his clenched fist, he went down the kitchen stairs and out across the road.

A hospital guard stopped him, but on learning who he was and that he had business with Miss Lynden, directed him toward a low, one-storied, stone structure, where, under the trees, a figure wrapped in a shawl lay asleep in a chair.

"She's been on duty all night," observed the guard. "If you've got to speak to her, go ahead."

"Yes," said Berkley in a dull voice, "I've got to speak to her."

And he walked toward her across the dead brown grass.

Letty's head lay on a rough pine table; her slim body, supported by a broken chair, was covered by a faded shawl; and, as he looked down at her, somehow into his memory came the recollection of the first time he ever saw her so--asleep in Casson's rooms, her childish face on the table, the room reeking with tobacco smoke and the stale odour of wine and dying flowers.

He stood for a long while beside her, looking down at the thin, pale face. Then, in pity, he turned away; and at the same moment she stirred, sat up, confused, and saw him.

"Letty, dear," he said, coming back, both hands held out to her, "I did not mean to rob you of your sleep."

"Oh--it doesn't matter! I am so glad--" She sat up suddenly, staring at him. The next moment the tears rushed to her eyes.

"O--h," she whispered, "I wished so to see you. I am so thankful you are here. There is--there has been such--a terrible change--something has happened----"

She rose unsteadily; laid her trembling hand on his arm.

"I don't know what it is," she said piteously, "but Ailsa--something dreadful has angered her against me----"

"Against _you_!"

"Oh, yes. I _don't_ know all of it; I know--partly."

Sleep and fatigue still confused her mind; she pressed both frail hands to her eyes, her forehead:

"It was the day I returned from seeing you at Paigecourt. . . . I was deadly tired when the ambulance drove into Azalea; and when it arrived here I had fallen asleep. . . . I woke up when it stopped. Ailsa was sitting here--in this same chair, I think--and I remember

as I sat up in the ambulance that an officer was just leaving
her--Captain Hallam."

She looked piteously at Berkley.

"He was one of the men I have avoided. Do you understand?"

"No. . . . Was he----"

"Yes, he often came to the--Canterbury. He had never spoken to me
there, but lone Carew knew him; and I was certain he would
recognise me. . . . I thought I had succeeded in avoiding him, but
he must have seen me when I was not conscious of his presence--he
must have recognised me."

She looked down at her worn shoes; the tears fell silently; she
smoothed her gray gown for lack of employment for her restless
hands.

"Dear," he said, "do you believe he went to Ailsa with his story
about you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I am sure. What else could it be that has angered
her--that drives me away from her--that burns me with the dreadful

gaze she turns on me--chills me with her more dreadful
silence? . . . Why did he do it? I don't know--oh, I don't
know. . . . Because I had never even spoken to him--in those days
that I have tried so hard--so hard to forget----

He said slowly: "He is a coward. I have known that for a long
time. But most men are. The disgrace lies in acting like one. . .
And I--that is why I didn't run in battle. . . . Because, that
first day, when they fired on our waggons, _I saw him riding in the
road behind us_. Nobody else suspected him to be within miles. I
saw him. And--_he galloped the wrong way_. And that is why
I--did what I did! He shocked me into doing it. . . . But I never
before have told a soul. I would not tell even you--but the man,
yesterday, put himself beyond the pale. And it can make no
difference now, for he carries the mark into his grave."

He shuddered slightly. "God forbid I hold him up to scorn. I
might, this very moment, be what he is now. No man may know--no
man can foretell how he will bear himself in time of stress. I
have a sorry record of my own. Battle is not the only conflict
that makes men or cowards."

He stood silent, gazing into space. Letty's tears dried as she
watched him.

"Have you seen--her?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes."

The girl sighed and looked down.

"I am so sorry about Colonel Arran I believe, somehow, he will get well."

"Do you really believe it, Letty?"

"Yes. The wound is clean. I have seen many recover who were far more dangerously hurt. . . . His age is against him, but I do truly believe he will get well."

He thought a moment. "Have you heard about Stephen Craig?"

"They have telegraphed to his affianced--a Miss Lent. You probably know her. Her brother was killed a day or two ago. Poor little thing! I believe that Miss Lent is coming. Mrs. Craig wishes to take her boy North as soon as he can be moved. And, unless the wound becomes infected, I don't believe he is going to die."

"Where is he?"

"At Paigecourt. Many transports are waiting at the landing. . . . They say that there was another severe engagement near there yesterday, and that our army is victorious. I have heard, also, that we were driven in, and that your regiment lost a great many men and horses . . . I don't know which is true," she added, listlessly picking at her frayed gown; "only, as we haven't heard the guns to-day, it seems to me that if we had lost the battle we'd have Confederate cannon thundering all around us."

"That seems reasonable," he admitted absently. . . . "Is Dr. Benton here still?"

"No," she said softly.

"Where is he?"

"At Paigecourt. I asked him to go because he is the best doctor I ever knew. He came down here to see me; he is not detailed for duty under contract. I asked him to go and see Stephen Craig. He grumbled--and went."

She looked up shyly at Berkley, smiled for the first time, then her pale young face grew beautiful and solemn.

"You dear girl," he said impulsively, taking both her hands and kissing them. "I am so glad for you--and for him. I knew it would come true."

"Yes. But I had to tell him--I started to tell him--and--oh, would you believe how splendid he is! He knew already! He stopped me short--and I never can forget the look in his face. And he said: 'Child--child! You can tell me nothing I am not already aware of. And I am aware of nothing except your goodness.'"

"I thought I knew Phineas Benton," said Berkley, warmly. "He was too upright a character for me to enjoy with any comfort--a few years back. . . . I'm trying harder than you ever had to, Letty. You always desired to be decent; I didn't." He shook both her hands heartily.

"You deserve every atom of your happiness, you dear, sweet girl! I only wish you were safely out of here and back in the North!"

Letty began to cry softly:

"Forgive me, please; I'm not naturally as tearful as this. I am just tired. I've done too much--seen too much--and it hasn't hardened me; it has made me like a silly child, ready to sniffle at anything."

Berkley laughed gently.

"Why are you crying now, Letty?"

"B-because they have offered me a furlough. I didn't apply. But Dr. Benton has made me take it. And it almost kills me to go North and leave Ailsa--alone--and so strangely changed toward me----"

She straightened her shoulders resolutely; brushed the tears from her lashes; strove to smile at him.

"Shall we walk a little? I am not on duty, you know; and I've had enough sleep. There's such a pretty lane along the creek behind the chapel. . . . What are you doing here, anyway? I suppose you are acting orderly to poor Colonel Arran? How splendidly the Lancers have behaved! . . . And those darling Zouaves!--oh, we are just bursting with pride over our Zou-zous----"

They had turned away together, walking slowly through the grove toward a little cart road deep in golden seeded grass which wound down a hollow all moist with ferns and brambles and young trees in heavy leaf.

Her hand, unconsciously, had sought his nestling into it with a confidence that touched him; her pale, happy face turned continually to meet his as she chatted innocently of the things which went to make up the days of life for her, never conscious of herself, or that the artless chatter disclosed anything admirable in her own character. She prattled on at random, sometimes naive, sometimes wistful, sometimes faintly humorous--a brave, clean spirit that was content to take the consequence of duty done--a tender, gentle soul, undeformed amid the sordid horrors that hardened or crippled souls less innocent.

Calm, resourceful, patient, undismayed amid conditions that sickened mature experience to the verge of despair, she went about her business day after day, meeting all requisitions upon her slender endurance without faltering, without even supposing there was anything unusual or praiseworthy in what she did.

She was only one of many women who did full duty through the darkest days the nation ever knew--saints in homespun, martyrs uncanonised save in the hearts of the stricken.

There was a small wooden foot-bridge spanning the brook, with a rough seat nailed against the rail.

"One of my convalescents made it for me," she said proudly. "He could use only one arm, and he had such a hard time sawing and

hammering! and the foolish boy wouldn't let anybody help him."

She seated herself in the cool shade of a water oak, retaining his hand in hers and making room for him beside her.

"I wonder," she said, "if you know how good you have been to me. You changed all my life. Do you realise it?"

"You changed it yourself, Letty."

She sighed, leaned back, dreamy eyed, watching the sun spots glow and wane on the weather-beaten footbridge.

"In war time--here in the wards--men seem gentler to women--kinder--than in times of peace. I have stood beside many thousands; not one has been unkind--lacking in deference. . . ." A slight smile grew on her lips; she coloured a little, looked up at Berkley, humorously.

"It would surprise you to know how many have asked me to marry them. . . . Such funny boys. . . . I scolded some of them and made them write immediately to their sweethearts. . . . The older men were more difficult to manage--men from the West--such fine, simple-natured fellows--just sick and lonely enough to fall in love with any woman who fanned them and brought them lemonade. . . . I

loved them all dearly. They have been very sweet to me. . . . Men
are good. . . . If a woman desires it. . . . The world is so
full of people who don't mean to do wrong."

She bent her head, considering, lost in the retrospection of her
naive philosophy.

Berkley, secretly amused, was aware of several cadaverous
convalescents haunting the bushes above, dodging the eyes of this
pretty nurse whom one and all adored, and whom they now beheld,
with jealous misgivings, in intimate and unwarrantable tete-a-tete
with a common and disgustingly healthy cavalryman.

Then his weather-tanned features grew serious.

The sunny moments slipped away as the sunlit waters slipped under
the bridge; a bird or two, shy and songless in their moulting
fever, came to the stream to drink, looking up, bright eyed, at the
two who sat there in the mid-day silence. One, a cardinal, ruffled
his crimson crest, startled, as Berkley moved slightly.

"The Red Birds," he said, half aloud. "To me they are the sweetest
singers of all. I remember them as a child, Letty."

After a while Letty rose; her thin hand lingered, on his shoulder

as she stood beside him, and he got to his feet and adjusted belt and sabre.

"I love to be with you," she said wistfully. "It's only because I do need a little more sleep that I am going back."

"Of course," he nodded. And they retraced their steps together.

He left her at the door of the quaint, one-storied stone building where, she explained, she had a cot.

"You will come to see me again before you go back to your regiment, won't you?" she pleaded, keeping one hand in both of hers.

"Of course I will. Try to get some sleep, Letty. You're tremendously pretty when you've had plenty of sleep."

They both laughed; then she went indoors and he turned away across the road, under the windows of the ward where Ailsa was on duty, and so around to his store-room dwelling-place, where he sat down on the cot amid the piles of boxes and drew from his pocket the crumpled sheets of the letter that Ailsa had given him.

The handwriting seemed vaguely familiar to him; he glanced

curiously down the page; his eyes became riveted; he reddened to the roots of his hair; then he deliberately began at the beginning, reading very carefully.

The letter had been written several weeks ago; it was dated, and signed with Hallam's name:

"MY DEAR MRS. PAIGE:

"Only my solemn sense of duty to all pure womanhood enables me to indite these lines to you; and, by so doing, to invite, nay, to encourage a cruel misunderstanding of my sincerest motives.

"But my letter is not dictated by malice or inspired by the natural chagrin which animates a man of spirit when he reflects upon the undeserved humiliation which he has endured from her who was once dearer to him than life itself. Mine is a nature susceptible and sensitive, yet, I natter myself, incapable of harbouring sentiments unworthy of a gentleman and a soldier.

"To forgive, to condone, is always commendable in man; but, madam, there is a higher duty men owe to womanhood--to chaste and trusting womanhood, incapable of defending itself from the wiles and schemes which ever are waiting to ensnare it.

"It is for this reason, and for this reason alone, that, my suspicions fully aroused, I have been at some pains to verify them.

A heart conscious of its moral rectitude does not flinch from the duty before it or from the pain which, unfortunately, the execution of that duty so often inflicts upon the innocent.

"Believe me, dear Mrs. Paige, it is a sad task that lies before me. Woman is frail and weak by nature. Man's noblest aspiration can attain no loftier consummation than in the protection of a pure woman against contamination.

"Mine becomes the unhappy mission of unmasking two unworthy people whom you, in your innocence and trust, have cherished close to your heart. I speak of the trooper Ormond--whose name I believe you know is Philip Berkley--and, if you now hear it for the first time, it is proof additional of his deceit and perfidy.

"The other is Miss Lynden, known, in a certain immoral resort called the Canterbury, as Letty Lynden, or 'Daisy' Lynden.

"She was a dancer in the Canterbury Music Hall. I enclose photographs of her in costume, also receipts from her landlady, washing lists, her contract with the Canterbury, all in her own handwriting, and all gathered for me at my request by a New York detective, and forwarded to me here. Among these papers you will

find several notes written to her in the spring and summer of 1861 by the trooper Berkley and discovered in her room by her landlady after her departure. A perusal of them is sufficient to leave no doubt concerning the character of this young woman--who, apparently, neglected by the fellow, Berkley, pleaded piteously with him for an interview, and was, as you see, cynically rebuffed.

"I enclose, also, an affidavit made by Miss Lynden's landlady that she, Letty, or 'Daisy' Lynden, was commonly understood to be the mistress of Berkley; that he took her from the Canterbury and from her lodgings, paid her board bills, and installed her in rooms at the enclosed address, where she remained until she found employment with a Doctor Benton.

"What her relations were with him I do not pretend to know. It is evident, however, that they continue, as he writes to her. It will also be apparent to you that she has not scrupled to continue her relations with the man Berkley.

"I will now further prove to you the truth of my assertion concerning this degrading and demoralising condition of affairs.

"It came to my knowledge that a certain Arthur Wye, serving in the volunteer artillery, and a certain subaltern in a zouave regiment, were not only intimates of the trooper Berkley, but had also been on dubious terms with the Lynden girl.

"Therefore, in company with an agent of the United States Secret Service detailed for the duty by Surgeon-General Hammond at my request, I held a private examination of these two men, and, with some adroitness, succeeded in making them identify the photographs of the Lynden girl, and later, unobserved by her, attempted to make them identify her as she was sitting outside the field hospital. But this they refused to do.

"However, that evidence was not necessary. Among her effects, scraps of letters in the waste-basket, etc., which she had imprudently left at her lodgings, were discovered fragments which, when pasted together, showed conclusively that she was on speaking terms at least with the artilleryman, Wye.

"This evidence I deem it my duty to lay before you. As a sensitive and chaste woman, gently born, the condition of affairs will horrify you. But the knowledge of them will also enable you to take measures for self-protection, and to clearly understand the measure which I shall now take to rid the Sanitary Service of this abandoned woman, who, as your friend and intimate associate, conceals her true character under the garb of Sainte Ursula, and who continues her intrigues with the trooper Berkley under the very roof that shelters you.

"I am, madam, with sincere pain and deepest sympathy and respect,

"Obediently your humble servant,

"EUGENE HALLAM,

"Capt. 8th N. Y. Cav."

He laid the letter and the enclosed papers on the bunk beside him, and sat there thinking.

He knew that the evidence before him had been sufficient to drive Letty from the Sanitary Service. Why had she not been driven? The evidence and the letter were weeks old now. What had prevented their use? And now Hallam was a fugitive--a deserter in the face of the enemy. It was too late for him to work more mischief if he would. But why had he held his hand against Letty?

Sunset found him still sitting there, thinking. The old negro came shuffling in, bringing hot hoe-cake and bacon for his dinner. He ate obediently; later he submitted to the razor and clothes brush, absently pondering the problem that obsessed him: "Why had Hallam spared Letty; how could he convey the truth to Ailsa Paige?"

At dusk he reported to the ward-master; but Colonel Arran was asleep, and there were no orders for him.

Then, slowly, he went into the adjoining ward. Ailsa was off duty,

lying down in her room. His message asking a moment's interview was refused.

So he turned away again, head bent, and wandered over to his store-room quarters, pondering the problem before him.

CHAPTER XIX

A car full of leaf tobacco had been brought in that day, and Berkley secured a little of it for his pipe.

Seated on the edge of the shaky veranda in the darkness, he filled and lighted his cob pipe and, smoking tranquilly, listened to the distant cannonade which had begun about sundown. Thousands of fire-flies sailed low in the damp swale beyond the store-house, or, clinging motionless to the long wet grass and vines, sparkled palely at intervals. There was no wind. Far on the southern horizon the muttering thunder became heavier and more distinct. From where he sat he could now watch the passage of the great mortar shells through the sky, looking like swiftly moving comets cleaving unfathomable space; then, falling, faster and faster, dropping out of the heights of night, they seemed to leave behind them tracks of fire that lingered on the dazzled retina long after they had disappeared. The explosion of the incendiary shells was even more spectacular; the burning matter of the chemical charge fell from them in showers of clear blue and golden stars, dropping

slowly toward the unseen river below.

He could distinguish the majestic thunder of the huge mortars from the roar of the Parrotts; the irregular volleys of musketry had a resonant clang of metal in them like thousands of iron balls dropped on a sheet of tin.

For an hour the distant display of fireworks continued, then the thunder rolled away, deadened to a dull rumour, and died out; and the last lingering spark of Greek fire faded in mid-heaven. A wavering crimson light brightened on the horizon, increasing, deepening. But what it was that had been set on fire he could not guess. Paigecourt lay in that direction.

He extended his booted legs, propped his back against a pillar, and continued smoking carefully and economically to save his fragments of Virginia leaf, deeply absorbed in retrospection.

For the first time he was now certain of the change which time, circumstance, and environment had wrought in himself; he was curiously conscious of the silent growth of a germ which, one day, must become a dictatorial and arbitrary habit--the habit of right thinking. The habit of duty, independent of circumstances, had slowly grown with his military training; mind and body had learned automatically to obey; mind and body now definitely recognised the importance of obedience, were learning to desire it, had begun to

take an obscure sort of pride in it. Mind and body were already subservient to discipline. How was it with his other self.

In the human soul there is seldom any real perplexity. Only the body reasons; the soul knows. He knew this now. He knew, too, that there is a greater drill-master than that which was now disciplining his mind and body--the spiritual will--that there is a higher sentiment than the awakened instinct of mental and physical obedience--the occult loyalty of the spirit. And, within him, something was now awaking out of night, slowly changing him, soul and body.

As he sat there, tranquil, pondering, there came a shadowy figure, moving leisurely under the lighted windows of the hospital, directly toward him--a man swinging a lantern low above the grass--and halted beside him in a yellow shaft of light,

"Berkley," he said pleasantly; then, to identify himself, lifted the lantern to a level with his face.

"Dr. Benton!"

"Surely--surely. I come from Paigecourt. I left Mrs. Craig and Stephen about five o'clock; I have just left Miss Lynden on duty. May I sit here beside you, Phil? And, in the first place, how are

you, old fellow?"

"Perfectly well, doctor. . . . I am glad to see you. . . . It is pleasant to see you. . . . I am well; I really am. You are, too; I can see that. . . . I want to shake hands with you again--to wish you happiness," he added in a low voice. "Will you accept my warmest wishes, Dr. Benton?"

They exchanged a hard, brief grip.

"I know what you mean. Thank you, Phil. . . . I am very happy; I mean that she shall be. Always."

Berkley said: "There are few people I really care for. She is among the few."

"I have believed so. . . . She cares, deeply, for you. . . . She is right." . . . He paused and glanced over his shoulder at the crimson horizon. "What was that shelling about? The gun-boats were firing, too."

"I haven't any idea. Something is on fire, evidently. I hope it is not Paigecourt."

"God forbid!"

The doctor looked hard at the fiery sky, but said nothing more.

"How is Stephen?" asked the younger man earnestly.

"Better."

"Is he going to get well?"

Dr. Benton thought a moment.

"He was struck by a conoidal ball, which entered just above the interclavicular notch of the sternum and lodged near the superior angle of the scapula. Assistant Surgeon Jennings, U. S. V., removed the bullet and applied simple dressings. There was a longitudinal groove on the bullet which may have been caused by contact with the bone, but there are no symptoms of injury to the osseous tissue. I hope he will recover entirely. Miss Lent, his affianced, is expected to-night. Arrangements have been made to convey him aboard a Sanitary Commission boat this evening. The sooner he starts North the better. His mother and Miss Lent go with him as nurses."

Berkley drew a quiet breath of relief. "I am glad," he said simply. "There is fever in the air here."

"There is worse, Phil. They're fine people, the Craigs. That mother of his stood the brutal shock of the news wonderfully--not a tear, not a tremor. She is a fine woman; she obeyed me, not implicitly, but intelligently. I don't like that kind of obedience as a rule; but it happened to be all right in her case. She has voluntarily turned Paigecourt and all the barns, quarters, farms, and out-buildings into a base hospital for the wounded of either army. She need not have done it; there were plenty of other places. But she offered that beautiful old place merely because it was more comfortable and luxurious. The medical corps have already ruined the interior of the house; the garden with its handsome box hedges nearly two centuries old is a wreck. She has given all the farm horses to the ambulances; all her linen to the medical director; all cattle, sheep, swine, poultry to the hospital authorities; all her cellared stores, wines, luxuries to the wounded. I repeat that she is a fine specimen of American woman--and the staunchest little rebel I ever met."

Berkley smiled, then his bronzed face grew serious in the nickering lantern light.

"Colonel Arran is badly hurt. Did you know it?"

"I do," said the doctor quietly. "I saw him just before I came over here to find you."

"Would you care to tell me what you think of his chances?"

"I--don't--know. He is in considerable pain. The wound continues healthy. They give him a great deal of morphia."

"Do you--believe----"

"I can't yet form an opinion worth giving you. Dillon, the assistant surgeon, is an old pupil of mine. He asked me to look in to-morrow; and I shall do so."

"I'm very glad. I was going to ask you. But--there's a good deal of professional etiquette in these hospitals----"

"It's everywhere," said the doctor, smiling. Then his pleasant, alert face changed subtly; he lifted the lantern absently, softly replaced it on the veranda beside him, and gazed at it. Presently he said:

"I came here on purpose to talk to you about another matter. . . . Shall we step inside? Or"--he glanced sharply around, lantern held

above his head--"I guess we're better off out here."

Berkley silently assented. The doctor considered the matter in mind for a while, nursing his knees, then looking directly at Berkley:

"Phil, you once told me a deliberate falsehood."

Berkley's face flushed scarlet, and he stiffened in every muscle.

The doctor said: "I merely wanted you to understand that I knew it to be a falsehood when you uttered it. I penetrated your motive in telling it, let it go at that, and kept both eyes open--and waited."

Berkley never moved. The painful colour stained the scar on his brow to an ugly purple.

"The consequences of which falsehood," continued the doctor, "culminated in my asking Miss Lynden to marry me. . . . I've been thinking--wondering--whether that lie was justifiable. And I've given up the problem. But I respect your motive in telling it. It's a matter for you to settle privately with yourself and your Maker. I'm no Jesuit by nature; but--well--you've played a man's part in the life of a young and friendless girl who has become to me the embodiment of all I care for in woman. And I thank you for

that. I thank you for giving her the only thing she lacked--a chance in the world. Perhaps there were other ways of doing it. I don't know. All I know is that I thank you for giving her the chance."

He ceased abruptly, folded his arms, and gazed musingly into space.

Then:

"Phil, have you ever injured a man named Eugene Hallam, Captain of your troop in the 8th Lancers?"

Berkley looked up, startled; and the hot colour began to fade.

"What do you know about Captain Hallam?" he asked.

"Where is he?"

"Probably a prisoner. He was taken at the cavalry affair which they now call Yellow Run."

"You saw him taken by the enemy?"

"No. I saw him--surrender--or rather, ride toward the enemy, apparently with that design in mind."

"Why don't you say that Hallam played the coward--that he deserted his men under fire--was even shot at by his own colonel?"

"You seem to know about it," said Berkley in a mortified voice. . . . "No man is anxious to reflect on his own regiment. That is why I did not mention it."

"Yes, I knew it. Your servant, the trooper Burgess, came to Paigecourt in search of you. I heard the detestable details from him. He was one of the detachment that got penned in; he saw the entire performance."

"I didn't know Burgess was there," said Berkley. "Is he all right?"

"Wears his left wrist in a sling; Colles's fracture; horse fell. He's a villainous-looking party; I wouldn't trust that fellow with a pewter button. But he seems devoted to you."

"I've never been able to make him out," said Berkley, smiling.

The doctor thought a minute.

"I saw two interesting people at Paigecourt. One was Miss Dix, an

old friend of mine; the other chanced to be Surgeon General Hammond. They were on a tour of inspection. I hope they liked what they saw."

"Did they?"

"I guess not. . . . Things in the hospitals ought to go better now. We're learning. . . . By the way, you didn't know that Ailsa Paige had been to Paigecourt, did you?"

"When?"

"Recently. . . . She's another fine woman. She never had an illness worse than whooping cough. I know because I've always been her physician. Normally she's a fine, wholesome woman, Berkley--but she told a falsehood. . . . You are not the only liar south of Dixon's damnable Line!"

Berkley straightened up as though shot, and the doctor dropped a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"The sort of lie you told, Phil, is the kind she told. It doesn't concern you or me; it's between her conscience and herself; and it's in a good safe place. . . . And now I'll sketch out for you what she did. This--this beast, Hallam, wrote to Miss Dix at

Washington and preferred charges against Miss Lynden. . . . I'm trying to speak calmly and coherently and without passion, damn it! Don't interrupt me. . . . I say that Hallam sent his written evidence to Miss Dix; and Ailsa Paige learned of it, and learned also what the evidence was. . . . And it was a terrible thing for her to learn, Phil--a damnable thing for a woman to learn."

He tightened his grasp on Berkley's shoulder, and his voice was not very steady.

"To believe those charges--that evidence--meant the death of her faith in you. . . . As for the unhappy revelation of what Miss Lynden had been--the evidence was hopelessly conclusive. Imagine what she thought! Any other woman would have sat aloof and let justice brand the woman who had doubly betrayed her. I want you to consider it; every instinct of loyalty, friendship, trust, modesty had apparently been outraged and trampled on by the man she had given her heart to, and by the woman she had made a friend. That was the position in which Ailsa Paige found herself when she learned of these charges, saw the evidence, and was informed by Hallam that he had forwarded his complaint."

His grip almost crushed Berkley's shoulder muscles.

"And now I'll tell you what Ailsa Paige did. She went before Miss Dix and told her that there was not one atom of truth in the

charges. She accounted for every date specified by saying that Miss Lynden was with her at those times, that she had known her intimately for years, known her family--that it was purely a case of mistaken identity, which, if ever pressed, would bewilder her friend, who was neither sufficiently experienced to understand what such charges meant, nor strong enough to endure the horror and shock if their nature were explained.

"She haughtily affirmed her absolute faith in you, avowed her engagement to marry you, pointed to your splendid military record; disdainfully exposed the motive for Hallam's action. . . . And she _convinced_ Miss Dix, who, in turn, convinced the Surgeon General. And, in consequence, I can now take my little girl away from here on furlough, thank God!--and thanks to Ailsa Paige, who lied like a martyr in her behalf. And that's what I came here to tell you."

He drew a long, shuddering breath, his hand relaxed on Berkley's shoulder, and fell away.

"I don't know to-day what Ailsa Paige believes; but I know what she did for the sake of a young girl. . . . If, in any way, her faith in you has been poisoned, remember what was laid before her, proven in black and white, apparently; remember, more than that, the terrible and physically demoralising strain she has been under in the line of duty. No human mind can remain healthy very long under such circumstances; no reasoning can be normal. The small daily

vexations, the wear and tear of nerve tissue, the insufficient sleep and nourishment, the close confinement in the hospital atmosphere, the sights, sounds, odours, the excitement, the anxiety--all combine to distort reason and undermine one's natural equipoise.

"Phil, if Ailsa, in her own heart, doubts you as she now doubts Letty, you must understand why. What she did shows her courage, her sweetness, her nobility. What she may believe--or think she believes--is born only of morbid nerves, overworked body, and a crippled power of reasoning. Her furlough is on the way; I did myself the honour to solicit it, and to interest Miss Dix in her behalf. It is high time; the child cannot stand much more. . . . After a good rest in the North, if she desires to return, there is nobody to prevent her . . . unless you are wise enough to marry her. What do you think?"

Berkley made no answer. They remained silent for a long time. Then the doctor rose and picked up his lantern; and Berkley stood up, too, taking the doctor's outstretched hand.

"If I were you, Phil, I'd marry her," said Benton. "Good-night. I'll see Colonel Arran in the morning. Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night," said Berkley in a dull voice.

Midnight found him pacing the dead sod in front of the veranda, under the stars. One by one the lights in the hospital had been extinguished; a lantern glimmered at the guard-house; here and there an illuminated window cast its oblong of paler light across the grass. Southward the crimson radiance had died out; softened echoes of distant gunshots marked the passing of the slow, dark hours, but the fitful picket firing was now no louder than the deadened stamp of horses in their stalls.

A faint scent of jasmine hung in the air, making it fresher, though no breeze stirred.

He stood for a while, face upturned to the stars, then his head fell. Sabre trailing, he moved slowly out into the open; and, at random, wandered into the little lane that led darkly down under green bushes to Letty's bridge.

It was fresher and cooler in the lane; starlight made the planking of the little foot-bridge visible in the dark, but the stream ran under it too noiselessly for him to hear the water moving over its bed of velvet sand.

A startled whippoorwill flashed into shadowy night from the rail as he laid his hand upon it, and, searching for the seat which Letty's invalid had built for her, he sank down, burying his head in his

hands.

And, as he sat there, a vague shape, motionless in the starlight, stirred, moved silently, detaching itself from the depthless wall of shadow.

There was a light step on the grass, a faint sound from the bridge. But he heard nothing until she sank down on the flooring at his feet and dropped her head, face downward, on his knees.

As in a dream his hands fell from his eyes--fell on her shoulders, lay heavily inert.

"Ailsa?"

Her feverish face quivered, hiding closer; one small hand searched blindly for his arm, closed on his sleeve, and clung there. He could feel her slender body tremble at intervals, under his lips, resting on her hair, her breath grew warm with tears.

She lay there, minute after minute, her hand on his sleeve, slipping, tightening, while her tired heart throbbed out its heavy burden on his knees, and her tears fell under the stars.

Fatigued past all endurance, shaken, demoralised, everything in her was giving way now. She only knew that he had come to her out of the night's deathly desolation--that she had crept to him for shelter, was clinging to him. Nothing else mattered in the world. Her weary hands could touch him, hold fast to him who had been lost and was found again; her tear-wet face rested against his; the blessed surcease from fear was benumbing her, quieting her, soothing, relaxing, reassuring her.

Only to rest this way--to lie for the moment unafraid--to cease thinking, to yield every sense to heavenly lethargy--to forget--to forget the dark world's sorrows and her own.

The high planets shed their calm light upon her hair, silvering her slender neck and the hand holding to his sleeve, and the steel edge of his sabre hilt, and a gilded button at his throat. And all else lay in shadow, wrapping them close together in obscurity.

At times he thought she was asleep, and scarcely moving, bent nearer; but always felt the nervous closing of her fingers on his sleeve.

And at last sleep came to her, deadening every sense. Cautiously he took her hand; the slim fingers relaxed; body and limbs were limp, senses clouded, as he lifted her in his arms and rose.

"Don't--go," she murmured drowsily.

"No, dear."

Through the darkness, moving with infinite care, he bore her under the stars and stepped noiselessly across the veranda, entered, and laid her on his cot.

"Philip," she murmured.

But he whispered to her that she must sleep, that he would be near her, close to her. And she sighed deeply, and her white lids closed again and rested unstirring on her pallid cheeks.

So she slept till the stars faded, then, awaking, lifted her head, bewildered, drawing her hand from his; and saw the dawn graying his face where he sat beside her.

She sat up, rigid, on the blanket, the vivid colour staining her from throat to brow; then memory overwhelmed her. She covered her eyes with both arms and her head dropped forward under the beauty of her disordered hair.

Minute succeeded minute; neither spoke nor moved. Then, slowly, in silence, she looked up at him and met his gaze. It was her confession of faith.

He could scarcely hear her words, so tremulously low was the voice that uttered them.

"Dr. Benton told me everything. Take me back. The world is empty without you. I've been through the depths of it--my heart has searched it from the ends to the ends of it. . . . And finds no peace where you are not--no hope--no life. All is desolation without you. Take me back."

She stretched out her hands to him; he took them, and pressed them against his lips; and looking across at him, she said:

"Love me--if you will--as you will. I make no terms; I ask none. Teach me your way; your way is mine--if it leads to you; all other paths are dark, all other ways are strange. I know, for I have trodden them, and lost myself. Only the path you follow is lighted for me. All else is darkness. Love me. I ask no terms."

"Ailsa, I can offer none."

"I know. You have said so. That is enough. Besides, if you love

me, nothing else matters. My life is not my own; it is yours. It has always been yours--only I did not know how completely. Now I have learned. . . . Why do you look at me so strangely? Are you afraid to take me for yourself? Do you think I do not know what I am saying? Do you not understand what the terror of these days without you has done to me? The inclination which lacked only courage lacks it no longer. I know what you have been, what you are. I ask nothing more of life than you."

"Dear," he said, "do you understand that I can never marry you?"

"Yes," she said steadily. "I am not afraid."

In the silence the wooden shutter outside the window swung to with a slam in the rising breeze which had become a wind blowing fitfully under a wet gray sky. From above the roof there came a sudden tearing sound, which at first he believed to be the wind. It increased to a loud, confusing, swishing whistle, as though hundreds of sabres were being whirled in circles overhead.

Berkley rose, looking upward at the ceiling as the noise grew in volume like a torrent of water flowing over rocks.

Ailsa also had risen, laying one hand on his arm, listening intently.

"What is it?" she breathed.

"It is the noise made by thousands of bullets streaming through the air above us. It sounds like that in the rifle-pits. Listen!"

The strange, bewildering sound filled the room. And now, as the wind shifted, the steady rattle of musketry became suddenly audible. Another sound, sinister, ominous, broke on their ears, the clang of the seminary bell.

"Is it an attack on this place?" she asked anxiously. "What can we do? There are no troops here! I--I must go to my sick boys----"

Her heart stood still as a cannon thundered, followed by the fearful sound of the shell as it came tearing toward them. As it neared, the noise grew deafening; the air vibrated with a rushing sound that rose to a shriek.

Ailsa's hands grasped his arm; her ears seemed bursting with the abominable sound; pain darted through her temples, flashing into agony as a heavy jar shook the house, followed by a dazzling light and roar.

Boom! Boom! came the distant, sullen thunder, followed by the unmistakable whirl of a Parrott shell. Suddenly shrapnel shells began to come over, screaming, exploding, filling the air with the rush and clatter of bullets.

"Lie down," he said. "You can't go out in this. It will veer off in a few moments, when they find out that they're shelling our hospitals."

"I've got to go," she repeated; "my boys won't understand why I don't come."

She turned and opened the door; he caught her in his arms, and she looked up and kissed him.

"Good-bye, dear," she whispered. "You mustn't detain me----"

"You shall not go outside----"

"I've got to. Be reasonable, dear. My sick are under fire."

The bugle was sounding now; his arms fell from her waist; she smiled at him, stepped outside, and started to run; and found him keeping pace between her and the west.

"You should not do that!" she panted, striving to pass him, but he kept his body in line with the incoming missiles. Suddenly he seized her and dropped flat with her as a shell plunged downward, exploding in a white cloud laced with flame through which the humming fragments scattered.

As they rose to their knees in the dust they saw men gathering--soldiers of all arms, infantry, dismounted cavalymen, hospital guards, limping convalescents, officers armed' with rifles, waggon drivers, negroes.

"They're attacking our works at Cedar Springs," said an officer wearing one hand in a sling. "This hospital is in a bad place."

Ailsa clapped both hands over her ears as a shell blew up at the angle of an outhouse and the ground rocked violently; then, pale but composed, she sprang inside the hospital door and ran for her ward.

It was full of pungent smoke; a Parrott shell had passed through a window, carrying everything away in its path, and had burst, terrifying the sick men lying there, but not injuring anybody.

And now a flare of light and a crash outside marked the descent of

another shell. The confusion and panic among the wounded was terrible; ward-masters, nurses, surgeons, ran hither and thither, striving to quiet the excited patients as shell after shell rushed yelling overhead or exploded with terrific force, raining its whirring iron fragments over roof and chimney.

Ailsa, calm and collected in the dreadful crisis, stood at the end of the ward, directing the unnerved stretcher bearers, superintending the carrying out of cots to the barns, which stood in the shelter of the rising ground along the course of the little stream.

Letty appeared from the corridor behind her; and Ailsa smiled and kissed her lightly on the cheek; and the blood came back to the girl's face in a passion of gratitude which even the terror of death could not lessen or check.

"Ailsa--darling--" she whispered; then shuddered in the violence of an explosion that shattered the window-glass beside her,

"We're taking them to the old barns, Letty," said Ailsa, steadying her voice. "Will you take charge here while I go to Colonel Arran?"

"They've taken him out," whispered Letty. "That ward is on fire. Everybody is out. W-what a cruel thing for our boys! Some of them

were getting well! Can you come now?"

"As soon as they carry out young Spencer. He's the last. . . .

Look from the window! They're trying to put out the fire with water in buckets. O--h!" as a shell struck and the flame flashed out through a geyser of sand and smoke.

"Come," murmured Letty. "I will stay if there is anything to stay for----"

"No, dear; we can go. Give me your hand; this smoke is horrible. Everything is on fire, I think. . . . Hurry, Letty!"

She stumbled, half suffocated, but Letty kept her hand fast and guided her to the outer air.

A company of cavalry, riding hard, passed in a whirlwind of dust. After them, clanking, thudding, pounding, tore a battery, horses on a dead run,

The west wing of the seminary was on fire; billows of sooty smoke rolled across the roof and blew downward over the ground where the forms of soldiers could be seen toiling to and fro with buckets.

Infantry now began to arrive, crowding the main road on the double quick, mounted officers cantering ahead. Long lines of them were swinging out east and west across the country, where a battery went into action wrapped in torrents of smoke.

Bullets swarmed, singing above and around in every key, and the distracting racket of the shrapnel shells became continuous.

Ailsa and Letty ran, stooping, into the lane where the stretchers were being hurried across the little footbridge. As they crossed they saw a dead artilleryman lying in the water, a crimson thread wavering from his head to the surface. It was Arthur Wye; and Letty knew him, and halted, trembling; but Ailsa called to her in a frightened voice, for, confused by the smoke, they had come out in the rear of a battery among the caissons, and the stretchers had turned to the right, filing down into the hollow where the barns stood on the edge of a cedar grove.

Already men were hard at work erecting hospital tents; the wounded lay on their stretchers, bloodless faces turned to the sky, the wind whipping their blankets and uncovering their naked, emaciated bodies. The faces of the dead had turned black.

"Good God!" said Dr. Benton as Letty and Ailsa came up, out of breath, "we've got to get these sick men under shelter! Can you two girls keep their blankets from blowing away?"

They hurried from cot to cot, from mattress to mattress, from one heap of straw to another, from stretcher to stretcher, deftly replacing sheet and blanket, tucking them gently under, whispering courage, sometimes a gay jest or smiling admonition to the helpless men, soothing, petting, reassuring.

The medical director with his corps of aides worked furiously to get up the big tents. The smoke from the battery blew east and south, flowing into the hollow in sulphurous streams; the uproar from the musketry was terrific.

Ailsa, kneeling beside a stretcher to tuck in the blankets, looked up over her shoulder suddenly at Letty.

"Where did they take Colonel Arran?"

"I don't know, dear."

Ailsa rose from her knees and looked around her through the flying smoke; then she got wearily to her feet and began to make inquiries. Nobody seemed to know anything about Colonel Arran.

Anxious, she threaded her way through the stretchers and the

hurrying attendants, past the men who were erecting the tents, looking everywhere, making inquiries, until, under the trees by the stream, she saw a heap of straw on which a man was dying.

He died as she came up--a big, pallid, red-headed zouave, whose blanket, soaked with blood, bore dreadful witness of his end.

A Sister of Charity rose as though dazed.

"I could not stop the hemorrhage," she said in her soft, bewildered voice.

Together they turned back toward the mass of stretchers, moving with difficulty in the confusion. Letty, passing, glanced wanly at the Sister, then said to Ailsa:

"Colonel Arran is in the second barn on the hay. I am afraid he is dying."

Ailsa turned toward the barns and hurried across the trampled sod.

Through the half light within she peered about her, moving carefully among the wounded stretched out on the fragrant hay.

Colonel Arran lay alone in the light of a window high under the eaves.

"Oh, here you are!" she said gaily. "I hear most most splendid things about you. I--" she stopped short, appalled at the terrible change that was coming over his face.

"I want to see--Phil--" he whispered.

"Yes--yes, I will find him," she said soothingly; "I will go immediately and find him."

His head was moving slowly, monotonously, from side to side.

"I want to see my boy," he murmured. "He is my son. I wish you to know it--my only son."

He lifted his brilliant eyes to Ailsa.

Twice he strove to speak, and could not, and she watched him, stunned.

He made the supreme effort.

"Philip!" he gasped; "our son! My little son! My little, little boy! I want him, Ailsa, I want him near me when I die!"

CHAPTER XX

They told her that Berkley had gone up the hill toward the firing line.

On the windy hill-top, hub deep in dry, dead grass, a section of a battery was in action, the violent light from the discharges lashing out through the rushing vapours which the wind flattened and drove, back into the hollow below so that the cannoneers seemed to be wading waist deep in fog.

The sick and wounded on their cots and stretchers were coughing and gasping in the hot mist; the partly erected tents had become full of it. And now the air in the hollow grew more suffocating as fragments of burning powder and wadding set the dead grass afire, and the thick, strangling blue smoke spread over everything.

Surgeons and assistants were working like beavers to house their patients; every now and then a bullet darted into the vale with an evil buzz, rewounding, sometimes killing, the crippled. To add to the complication and confusion, more wounded arrived from the

firing line above and beyond to the westward; horses began to fall where they stood harnessed to the caissons; a fine, powerful gun-team galloping back to refill its chests suddenly reared straight up into annihilation, enveloped in the volcanic horror of a shell, so near that Ailsa, standing below in a clump of willows, saw the flash and smoke of the cataclysm and the flying disintegration of dark objects scattering through the smoke.

Far away on the hillside an artilleryman, making a funnel of his hands, shouted for stretchers; and Ailsa, repeating the call, managed to gather together half a dozen overworked bearers and start with them up through the smoke.

Deafened, blinded, her senses almost reeling under the nerve-shattering crash of the guns, she toiled on through the dry grass, pausing at the edge of charred spaces to beat out the low flames that leaped toward her skirts.

There was a leafy hollow ahead, filled with slender, willow-trees, many of them broken off, shot, torn, twisted, and splintered. Dead soldiers lay about under the smoke, their dirty shirts or naked skin visible between jacket and belt; to the left on a sparsely wooded elevation, the slope of which was scarred, showing dry red sand and gravel, a gun stood, firing obliquely across the gully into the woods. Long, wavering, irregular rings of smoke shot out, remaining intact and floating like the rings from a smoker's pipe,

until another rush and blast of flame scattered them.

The other gun had been dismounted and lay on its side, one wheel in the air, helpless, like some monster sprawling with limbs stiffened in death. Behind it, crouched close, squatted some infantry soldiers, firing from the cover of the wreckage. Behind every tree, every stump, every inequality, lay infantry, dead, wounded, or alive and cautiously firing. Several took advantage of the fallen battery horses for shelter. Only one horse of that gun-team remained alive, and the gunners had lashed the prolonge to the trail of the overturned cannon and to the poor horse's collar, and were trying to drag the piece away with the hope of righting it.

This manoeuvre dislodged the group of infantry soldiers who had taken shelter there, and, on all fours, they began crawling and worming and scuffling about among the dead leaves, seeking another shelter from the pelting hail of lead.

There was nothing to be seen beyond the willow gully except smoke, set grotesquely with phantom trees, through which the enemy's fusillade sparkled and winked like a long level line of fire-flies in the mist.

The stretcher bearers crept about gathering up the wounded who called to them out of the smoke. Ailsa, on her knees, made her way toward a big cavalryman whose right leg was gone at the thigh.

She did what she could, called for a stretcher, then, crouching close under the bank of raw earth, set her canteen to his blackened lips and held it for him.

"Don't be discouraged," she said quietly, "they'll bring another stretcher in a few moments. I'll stay here close beside you until they come."

The cavalryman was dying; she saw it; he knew it. And his swollen lips moved.

"Don't waste time with me," he managed to say.

"Then--will you lie very still and not move?"

"Yes; only don't let the horse step on me."

She drew her little note-book and pencil from the pocket of her gown and gently lowered her head until one ear was close to his lips.

"What is your name and regiment?"

His voice became suddenly clear.

"John Casson--Egerton's Dragoons. . . . Mrs. Henry Casson, Islip,
Long Island. My mother is a widow; I don't--think
she--can--stand----"

Then he died--went out abruptly into eternity.

Beside him, in the grass, lay a zouave watching everything with great hollow eyes. His body was only a mass of bloody rags; he had been shot all to pieces, yet the bleeding heap was breathing, and the big sunken eyes patiently watched Ailsa's canteen until she encountered his unwinking gaze. But the first swallow he took killed him, horribly; and Ailsa, her arms drenched with blood, shrank back and crouched shuddering under the roots of a shattered tree, her consciousness almost deserting her in the roaring and jarring and splintering around her. She saw more stretcher bearers in the smoke, stooping, edging their way--unarmed heroes of many a field who fell unnoted, died unrecorded on the rolls of glory.

A lieutenant of artillery, powder-blackened, but jaunty, called down to her from the bank above:

"Look out, little lady. We're going to try to limber up, and we

don't want to drop six horses and a perfectly good gun on top of you!"

Somebody seized her arm and dragged her across the leaves; and she struggled to her knees, to her feet, turned, and started to run.

"This way," said Berkley's voice in her ear; and his hand closed on hers.

"Phil--help me--I don't know where I am!"

"I do. Run this way, under the crest of the hill. . . . Dr.

Connor told me that you had climbed up here. This isn't your place! Are you stark mad?"

They ran on westward, panting, sheltered by the grassy crest behind which soldiers lay firing over the top of the grass--long lines of them, belly flattened to the slope, dusty blue trousers hitched up showing naked ankles and big feet pendant. Behind them, swords drawn, stood or walked their officers, quietly encouraging them or coolly turning to look at Ailsa and Berkley as they hurried past.

In a vast tobacco field to their left, just beyond a wide cleft in the hills, a brigade of cavalry was continually changing station to avoid shell fire. The swallow-tailed national flags, the yellow

guidons with their crossed sabres, the blue State colours, streamed above their shifting squadrons as they trotted hither and thither with the leisurely precision of a peaceful field day; but here and there from the trampled earth some fallen horse raised its head in agony; here and there the plain was dotted with dark heaps that never stirred.

The wailing flight of bullets streamed steadily overhead, but, as they descended, the whistling, rushing sound grew higher and fainter. They could see, on the plain where the cavalry was manoeuvring, the shells bursting in fountains of dirt, the ominous shrapnel cloud floating daintily above.

Far away through the grassy cleft, on wooded hillsides, delicately blue, they could see the puff of white smoke shoot out from among the trees where the Confederate batteries were planted, then hear the noise of the coming shell rushing nearer, quavering, whistling into a long-drawn howl as it raced through the gray clouds overhead.

While he guided her among the cedars at the base of the hill, one arm around her body to sustain her, he quietly but seriously berated her for her excursion to the firing line, telling her there was no need of it, no occasion for anybody except the bearers there; that Dr. Connor was furious at her and had said aloud that she had little common-sense.

Ailsa coloured painfully, but there was little spirit left in her, and she walked thankfully and humbly along beside him, resting her cheek, against his shoulder.

"Don't scold me; I really feel half sick, Phil. . . . From where did you come?" she added timidly.

"From the foot bridge. They wanted a guard set there. I found half a dozen wounded men who could handle a musket. Lord, but the rebels came close to us that time! When we heard those bullets they were charging the entire line of our works. I understand that we've driven them all along the line. It must be so, judging from the sound of the firing."

"Did our hospital burn?"

"Only part of one wing. They're beginning to move back the wounded already. . . . Now, dear, will you please remain with your superiors and obey orders?" he added as they came out along the banks of the little stream and saw the endless procession of stretchers recrossing the foot bridge to the left.

"Yes. . . . I didn't know. I saw part of a battery blown up; and a soldier stood on the hill and shouted for stretchers. There was nobody else to start them off, so I did it."

He nodded. "Wait here, dear. I will run over and ask Dr. Connor whether they have moved Colonel Arran----"

"Colonel Arran! Oh, Philip! I forgot to tell you--" She clutched his arm in her excitement, and he halted, alarmed.

"Has anything happened to him?" he demanded.

"He asked for you."

"Is he worse?"

"I fear so."

"Dying?"

"Phil--I am afraid so. He--he--thinks that you are his son!"

"W-what are you saying!" he stammered: "What are you trying to tell me, Ailsa?"

"Phil--my darling!--don't look that way!" she exclaimed, frightened.

"What way?" He laughed as though crazed. "Where is he? Do you know? I want to see him. You better let me see him."

"I'll go with you, Phil; I'll be close beside you. You mustn't become so terribly excited; I didn't know what I was saying; I think he is delirious----"

"Where is he? I can't endure this much longer," he kept repeating in a vacant way as they forced a path among the litters and ambulances, and came out through the smoke blowing from a pile of debris that lay where the east wing of the seminary had once stood. Charred and battered, every window smashed, and the blackened rafters of the roof still smouldering, the east wing rose before them, surrounded by the wounded.

A surgeon told them that Colonel Arran had been carried out of the barn, but to what place he did not know. Letty with Dr. Benton passed them by the stables, but they knew only that Colonel Arran, lying on a litter, had been placed in an ambulance which had started for Azalea Court House.

This was confirmed by Dr. Connor, who came hurrying by and who halted to scowl heartily at Ailsa.

"No more of _that_!" he said roughly. "When I want a nurse on the firing line I'll detail her. I've sent two hundred invalids to the landing, and I wanted you to go with them and when I looked around for you I saw you kiting for the line of battle! That's all wrong, Mrs. Paige! That's all wrong! You look sick anyway. Are you?"

"No. I'll go now, if you'll let me, Dr. Connor."

"How are you going to get there? I haven't another ambulance to send--not a horse or a mule----"

"I--I'll walk," she said with a sob in her throat. "I am fearfully sorry--and ashamed----"

"There, there," muttered Dr. Connor, "I didn't mean all I said. It was a brave thing to do--not that your pluck mitigates the offence! Be a little more considerate; think a little faster; don't take to your legs on the first impulse. Some fool told me you'd been killed--and that made--made me--most damnably angry!" he burst out with a roar to cover the emotion working at his mouth and eyes.

He seized Ailsa's hand and shook it vigorously.

"Excuse my profanity. I can't avoid it when I think of

you--dead! There, there. I'm an old fool and you're a--younger one. See if you can find somebody to take you to Azalea. I want that batch of invalids carefully watched. Besides, there's a furlough there for you. Don't say one word! You're not well, I tell you. I had to send those invalids back; the place here is atrociously crowded. Try to find some way of getting to the landing. And take care of your pretty little self for God's sake!"

She promised, shook hands with him again, disengaged herself from the crowd around her, turned about to search for Berkley, and caught sight of him near the stables, saddling his horse. He buckled the last strap as she came up; turned a blank gaze on her, and did not appear to comprehend her question for a moment. Then, nodding in a dazed way, he lifted her to the saddle in front, swung up behind her, passed one arm around her waist, gathered bridle, and edged his way carefully through the crowd out into the road.

The 3rd Zouaves in heavy marching order filled the road with their scarlet column, moving steadily southward; and Ailsa, from her perch on the saddle, called to Colonel Craig and Major Lent, stretching out her hot little hand to them as she passed.

Engineers blocked their progress farther on, then Wisconsin infantry, young giants in blue, swinging forward in their long loose-limbered stride; then an interminable column of artillery, jolting slowly along, the grimy gunners swaying drowsily on their

seats, officers nodding half asleep in their saddles.

"Philip," she ventured timidly.

"Yes."

"Is there--anything--you wish to tell me? Anything that I--perhaps--have a faint shadow of a right to know?"

For a long time they rode in silence, her question unanswered. A narrow cart road--less of a road than a lane--led east. He turned his horse into it.

For a moment no sound broke the silence save the monotonous clank of his sabre and the creak of girth and saddle.

"Ailsa!"

"Yes, Phil."

"Move closer; hold very tight to me; clasp both arms around my neck. . . . Are you seated firmly?"

"Yes, Phil."

He encircled her slender body with his right arm and, shaking out the bridle, launched his horse at a gallop down the sandy lane.

Her breath and his mingled as they sped forward; the wind rushed by, waving the foliage on either hand; a steady storm of sand and gravel rained rattling through the bushes as the spurred horse bounded forward, breaking into a grander stride, thundering on through the gathering dusk.

Swaying, cradled in his embrace, her lips murmured his name, or, parted breathless, touched his, as the exquisitely confused sense of headlong speed dimmed her senses to a happy madness.

Trees, bushes, fences flew past and fled away behind in the dusk. It seemed to her as though she was being tossed through space locked in his arms; infinite depths of shadow whirled and eddied around her; limitless reaches, vistas unfathomable stretched toward outer chaos into which they were hurled, unseeing, her arms around his neck, her soft face on his breast.

Then a lantern flashed; voices sounded in far-off confusion; more lanterns twinkled and glimmered; more voices broke in on their heavenly isolation.

Was the divine flight ended?

Somebody said: "Colonel Arran is here, and is still alive, but his mind is clouding. He says he is waiting for his son to come."

Dizzy, burning hot, half blinded, she felt herself swung out of space onto the earth again, through a glare of brightness in which Celia's face seemed to be framed, edged with infernal light. . . .

And another face, Camilla's, was there in the confusing brilliancy; and she reeled a little, embraced, held hot and close; and in her dulled ears drummed Celia's voice, murmuring, pitying, complaining, adoring:

"Honey-bell--Oh, my little Honey-bud! I have you back in my a'ms, and I have my boy, and I'm ve'y thankful to my Heavenly Master--I certainly am, Honey-bee!--fo' His goodness and His mercy which He is showing eve'y day to me and mine."

And Camilla's pale face was pressed against her hot cheeks and the girl's black sleeve of crape encircled her neck.

She whispered: "I--I try to think it reconciles me to losing Jimmy. . . . War gave me Stephen. . . . Yet--oh, I cannot understand why God's way must sometimes be the way of battle!"

Ailsa saw and heard and understood, yet, all around her fell an unreal light--a terrible fiery radiance, making voices the voices, of phantoms, forms the outlines of ghosts.

Through an open door she saw a lamp-lit room where her lover knelt beside a bed--saw a man's arm reach feebly toward him--and saw no more. Everything wavered and dazzled and brightened into rainbow tints around her, then to scarlet; then velvety darkness sprang up, through which she fell into swift unconsciousness.

One of the doctors, looking at her as she lay on the hospital cot, dropped his hand gravely on her thin wrist.

"You cannot tell me anything that I don't know about Mrs. Paige," he said wearily. "This is a complete breakdown. It's come just in time, too, that girl has been trying to kill herself. I understand that her furlough has arrived. You'd better get her North on the next transport. I guess that our angels are more popular in our hospitals just now than they would be tuning little gilt harps aloft. We can't spare 'em, Mrs. Craig, and I guess the Most High can wait a little longer."

Doctor, ward-master, apothecary, and nurses stood looking down at the slim, fever-flushed shape moving restlessly on the cot--babbling soft inconsequences, staring out of brilliant eyes at

nothing.

The doctor whispered to the apothecary, and his gesture dismissed those who stood around her waiting in silence.

CHAPTER XXI

Early in October the Union Cavalry began their favourite pastime of "chasing" Stuart. General Pleasanton with a small force and a horse battery began it, marching seventy-eight miles in twenty-four hours; but Stuart marched ninety in the same time. He had to.

About ten o'clock in the morning of October tenth, General Buford, chief of cavalry, set the 6th Pennsylvania Lancers galloping after Stuart. Part of the 1st Maine Cavalry joined the chase; but Stuart flourished his heels and cantered gaily into Pennsylvania to the amazement and horror of that great State, and to the unbounded mortification of the Union army. He had with him the 1st, 3d, 4th, 5th and 9th Virginia Cavalry; the 7th and 9th North Carolina, and two Legions; and after him went pelting the handful that McClellan could mount. A few tired troopers galloped up to Whitens Ford just as Stuart crossed in safety; and the gain of "chasing" Stuart was over. Never had the efficiency of the Union Cavalry been at such a low ebb; but it was low-water mark, indeed, and matters were destined to mend after a history of nearly two years of neglect, disorganisation, and misuse.

Bayard took over the cavalry south of Washington; Pleasanton collected the 6th Regulars, the 3d Indiana, the 8th New York, the 8th Pennsylvania, and the 8th Illinois, and started in to do mischief with brigade head-quarters in the saddle.

The 8th New York went with him, but the 8th New York Lancers, reorganising at Orange Hill, were ordered to recruit the depleted regiment to twelve companies.

In August, Berkley's ragged blue and yellow jacket had been gaily embellished with brand-new sergeant's chevrons; at the Stone Bridge where the infantry recoiled his troop passed over at a gallop.

The War Department, much edified, looked at the cavalry and began to like it. And it was ordered that every cavalry regiment be increased by two troops, L and M. Which liberality, in combination with Colonel Arran's early reports concerning Berkley's conduct, enabled the company tailor to sew a pair of lieutenant's shoulder-straps on Berkley's soiled jacket.

But there was more than that in store for him; it was all very well to authorise two new troops to a regiment, but another matter to recruit them.

Colonel Arran, from his convalescent couch in the North, wrote to

Governor Morgan; and Berkley got his troop, and his orders to go to New York and recruit it. And by the same mail came the first letter Ailsa had been well enough to write him since her transfer North on the transport _Long Branch_.

He read it a great many times; it was his only diversion while awaiting transportation at the old Hygeia Hotel, where, in company with hundreds of furloughed officers, he slept on the floors in his blanket; he read it on deck, as the paddle-wheeled transport weighed anchor, swung churning under the guns of the great Fortress--so close that the artillerymen on the water-battery could have tossed a biscuit aboard--and, heading north-east, passed out between the capes, where, seaward, the towering black sides of a sloop of war rose, bright work aglitter, smoke blowing fitfully from her single funnel.

At Alexandria he telegraphed her: "Your letter received, I am on my way North," and signed it with a thrill of boyish pride: "Philip O. Berkley-Arran, Capt. Cavalry, U. S. V."

To his father he sent a similar telegram from the Willard in Washington; wasted two days at the State, War, and Navy for an audience with Mr. Stanton, and finally found himself, valise in hand, waiting among throngs of officers of all grades, all arms of the service, for a chance to board his train.

And, as he stood there, he felt cotton-gloved fingers fumbling for the handle of his valise, and wheeled sharply, and began to laugh.

"Where the devil did you come from, Burgess? Did they give you a furlough?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Well, you got more than I. What's the matter; do you want to carry my bag?"

"Yes, sir."

"You don't have to."

"No, Captain. . . . If you don't object, sir, I'll carry it."

They found seats together; Philip, amused, tried to extract from Burgess something besides the trite and obvious servant's patter--something that might signify some possibility of a latent independence--the germ of aspiration. And extracted nothing. Burgess had not changed, had not developed. His ways were Philip's ways; his loftier flights mounted no higher toward infinity than the fashions prevailing in the year 1862, and their suitability to

his master's ultimate requirements.

For his regiment, for its welfare, its hopes, its glory, he apparently cared nothing; nor did he appear to consider the part he had borne in its fluctuating fortunes anything to be proud of.

Penned with the others in the brush field, he had done stolidly what his superiors demanded of him; and it presently came out that the only anxiety that assailed him was when, in the smoke of the tangled thickets, he missed his late master.

"Well, what do you propose to do after the regiment is mustered out?" inquired Philip curiously.

"Wait on you, sir."

"Don't you _want_ to do anything else?"

"No, sir."

Philip looked at him, smiling.

"I suppose you like my cigars, and my brandy and my linen?"

The ghost of a grin touched the man's features.

"Yes, sir," he said with an impudence that captivated Philip.

"All right, my friend; I can stand it as long as you can. . . .

And kindly feel in my overcoat for a cigar wrapped in paper. I'll go forward and smoke for a while."

"Sir?"

"The cigar--I put it in my overcoat pocket wrapped in a bit of paper. . . . You--you don't mean to tell me that it's not there!"

Burgess searched the pockets with a perfectly grave face.

"It ain't here; no, sir."

Philip flung himself into the corner of his seat, making no effort to control his laughter:

"Burgess," he managed to say, "the dear old days are returning already. I'll stay here and read; you go forward and smoke that cigar. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

Again, just as he had done every day since leaving camp, he reread Ailsa's letter, settling down in his corner by the dirty, rattling window-pane:

"Everybody writes to you except myself. I know they have told you that it is taking a little longer for me to get well than anybody expected. I was terribly tired. Your father has been so sweet; everybody has been good to me--Celia, poor little Camilla, and Stephen. I know that they all write to you; and somehow I have been listlessly contented to let them tell you about home matters, and wait until my strength returned. But you must not doubt where every waking memory of mine has centred; my thoughts have circled always around that central vortex from which, since I first laid eyes on you, they have never strayed.

"Home news is what all good soldiers want; I write for you all I know:

"The city is the same hot, noisy, dirty, dusty, muddy, gridiron, changed in nowise except that everywhere one sees invalid soldiers; and there are far too many officers lounging about, presumably on furlough--too many Captain Dash's, twirling black moustaches in

front of fashionable hotels. There are no powder stains on their uniforms, no sun-burn on their cheeks. They throng the city; and it is a sinister phenomenon.

"I think Broadway was never as lively, never quite as licentious. Those vivid cafes, saloons, concert halls, have sprung up everywhere; theatres, museums, gardens are in full blast; shops are crowded, hotels, street cars, stages overflowing with careless, noisy, overdressed people. The city is *_en fete_*; and somehow when I think of that Dance of Death thundering ceaselessly just south of us, it appalls me to encounter such gaiety and irresponsibility in the streets.

"Yet, after all, it may be the safety-valve of a brave people. Those whirling daily in the Dance of Death have, at least, the excitement to sustain them. Here the tension is constant and terrible; and the human mind cannot endure too much tragedy.

". . . They say our President fits a witticism to the tragedy of every battle-field; but it may be to preserve his own reason through these infernal years. He has the saddest eyes of any man since the last Martyr died.

"England behaves badly. It was her God-given opportunity to stand by us. She has had chance after chance since the last patriot died from lack of food and air in this sad old city of New York. . . .

The Prince Consort is kind; his wife is inclined to be what he is. Napoleon is the sinister shape behind the arras; and the Tory government licks his patent-leather boots. Vile is the attitude of England, vile her threats, her sneers, her wicked contempt of a great people in agony. Her murderous government, bludgeon in hand, stands snarling at us in Mexico; her ministers glare at us from every war port; her press mocks in infamous caricature our unhappy President; only her poor are with us--the poor of England whom our war is starving. Again and again we have forgiven her. But now, standing on our blood-wet battle-fields, can we ever again forgive?

"You have heard from your family and from Celia, so what news I write may be no news. Yet I know how it is with soldiers; they never tire of such repetitions.

"Your father is slowly recovering. But he will never sit his saddle again, dear. Don't expect it; the war is over as far as he is concerned. But never have my eyes beheld such happiness, such gratitude, such adoration as I see in his eyes when your letters come. I think the burden of his conversation is you. I never hear him speak of anything else. Your father walks now; and by the time you are here he will be able to drive on Fifth Avenue and in the new Central Park. But he is not the man who left this city at the head of his regiment. His hair and moustache are white as snow; there are a thousand tiny wrinkles on his hands and features. All that heavy colour is gone; only a slight flush remains on his thin face. He is very handsome, Phil. Once, never dreaming of what was

true, I thought he resembled you. Do you recollect my saying so once? Even you would recognise the likeness now. He is absorbed, wrapped up in you. . . . I can see, now, that he always has been. How blind we are! How blind!

"Celia, the darling, has not changed one particle. She is the prettiest thing you ever saw, cheerful, clever, courageous, self-possessed, devoted to Stephen, whose leave has been extended and who plays the role of a pale and interesting invalid hero with placid satisfaction to himself, adored and hovered over by Paige and Marye and all their girl friends. But when poor little Camilla, in her deep mourning, appears at the door, he clears out the others with a tyranny characteristic of young men; and I'm somewhat sorry for his mother and sisters. But it's the inevitable; and Camilla is the sweetest thing.

"Celia hears often from Curt, Poor Major Lent! It seems too hard that Camilla should be left so utterly alone in the world. The Major died as he would have wished to die, Curt writes. It was at that terrible Stone Bridge--where God was merciful to me when your squadron galloped across.

"He was found, seated against a tree, stone dead, one hand stiffened over the Mexican war medal at his throat. Curt says his face was calm, almost smiling. Camilla has his sword and medals.

"Did you know that your friend John Casson was dead? I was with him; I did not know he was a friend of yours. He displayed the same patience, the same desire not to be troublesome that so many badly wounded do.

"Letty asked me to say that a zouave of the 5th Regiment, a Mr. Cortlandt, was also killed. So many, many people I knew or had heard of have been killed or have died of disease since the war began. One sees a great many people wearing mourning in the city--crape is so common, on sword-hilts, on arms, veils, gowns, bonnets.

"Letty made the loveliest bride you or I ever beheld. Usually brides do not look their best, but Letty was the most charming, radiant, bewildering creature--and so absurdly young--as though suddenly she had dropped a few years and was again beginning that girlhood which I sometimes thought she had never had.

"Dr. Benton is a darling. He looks twenty years younger and wears a monocle! They are back from their honeymoon, and are planning to offer their services to the great central hospital at Philadelphia.

"Dear, your letter breaking the news to me that Marye Mead was burned when the cavalry burned Edmund Ruffin's house was no news to me. I saw it on fire. But, Philip, there was a fiercer flame

consuming me than ever swept that house. I thank God it is quenched for ever and that my heart and soul, refreshed, made new, bear no scars now of that infernal conflagration.

"I sit here at my window and see below me the folds of the dear flag stirring; in my ears, often, is the noise of drums from the dusty avenue where new regiments are passing on into the unknown--no longer the unknown to us--but the saddest of all truths.

"Sometimes Celia comes from the still, leafy seclusion of Fort Greene Place, to love me, caress me, gently jeer at me for the hint of melancholy in my gaze, shaming me for a love-sick thing that droops and pines in the absence of all that animates her soul and body with the desire to live.

"She is only partly right; I am very tired, Phil. Not that I am ill. I am well, now. It only needs you. She knows it; I have always known it. Your love, and loving you, is all that life means to me.

"I see them all here--Celia fussing with my trousseau, gowns, stockings, slippers, hovering over them with Paigie and Marye in murmurous and intimate rapture. They lead me about to shops and in busy thoroughfares; and I see and understand, and I hear my own voice as at an infinite distance, and I am happy in the same indefinite way. But, try as I may, I cannot fix my thoughts on

what I am about, on the pretty garments piled around me, on the necessary arrangements to be made, on the future--our future! I cannot even think clearly about that. All that my mind seems able to contain is my love for you, the knowledge that you are coming, that I am to see you, touch you.

"I try to realise that I am to be your wife; the heavenly reality seems vaguely impossible. Yet every moment I am schooling myself to the belief, telling myself that it is to be, repeating the divine words again and again. And all I am capable of understanding is that I love you, and that the world stands still, waiting for you as I wait; and that without you nothing is real, and I move in a world of phantoms.

"I have been to the mirror to look at myself. To be certain, I also asked Celia. She says that you will not be disappointed.

"She sat here searching the morning paper for news of her husband's regiment, but found none. What women endure for men no man that ever lives can understand.

"She is perfectly cheerful about it all. And, oh, such a rebel! She read aloud to me with amused malice the order from the War Department which does away with regimental bands and substitutes a brigade band.

"I sca'cely blame them,' she observed; 'I'd be ve'y glad myse'f to hear less of Yankee Doodle and the Star-spangled Banner. When they let President Davis alone, and when Curt comes home, I've got some ve'y pretty songs fo' him to learn to appreciate.'

"She's down stairs now, seated at the piano, singing very softly to herself some gaily impudent rebel song or other. I know it's a rebel song by the way she sings it.

"And, as I sit here, alone, thinking of how I love you--far away I hear the 'old line's bugle'--the quaint, quick rhythm of the fifes and drums; and it stirs depths in me where my very soul lies listening--and the tears spring to my eyes. And I try to understand why every separate silver star in the flag is mine to hold, mine to rescue and replace, mine to adore. And I try to understand why all of it is part of the adoration of you, and of God who gave you to me--Philip--Philip--my lover, my country, my God--worshipped and adored of men!"

[Illustration: "Philip--Philip--my lover, my country, my God--worshipped and adored of men!"]

THE END