

COLLABORATEURS.

BY S. D. SCHULTZ.

CHAPTER I. (Continued.)

ETHEL had now regained composure, and quickly made up her mind as to the course she would adopt. She did not stop to analyze her feelings. Archer had never appeared to her in the guise of a lover. They had certainly exchanged confidences, but this was most unexpected, so she quietly said in a kindly manner, feeling that Archer was in earnest, and not wishing to unnecessarily pain him, "I'm sorry, but you musn't speak to me like that. I do not think the less of you, though, and shall esteem you as a friend."

Archer realized how hard hit he was upon hearing this reply, but he bravely tried to divert the conversation into other channels. The effort was vain, and the subsequent remarks were strained and jerky. Ethel soon terminated the embarrassment by pleading weariness. Rising, she held out her hand in a frankly, confident air, considerably intending to render Archer's *contretemps* a forgotten circumstance. His nerveless fingers had barely touched the tips of hers, and with mingled feelings of shame and despair, he watched her lissome figure slowly pass along the corridor and flit through the door.

His discomfiture at the well-merited rebuff was added to by the thought that Ethel would regard his conduct as a mere unit in a host of uncontrollable impulses. The more he analyzed that ill-considered speech, the more incongruous it seemed with his whole nature and past life. Where were his impenetrable reserve and vaunted *blase*? And how egotistical to dream that any self-respecting girl could act otherwise with one who had the temerity to make erotic proposals in sober earnest after a week's acquaintance. It was absurd. "And yet, after all," he mused, raising a foot, which he kept swinging to and fro, and straining interlaced fingers against his knee, "there's nothing uncommon about a hasty confession of love. This is the age of electricity, etc., and it isn't necessary to imitate foggy ancestors by scurrying after a notary, worrying over settlements, dots and *trousseau*. No; things are worked differently now. One falls captive before irresistible eyes, a "tailor-made" is ordered, and the city clerk duly officiates and rakes in the fee. Within a week, the connubial serenity is ruffled by a trifling difference of opinion, some one calls some one else 'nasty,' and whilst the engine halts at the water tank, the nuptial knot is loosened by an Oklahoma J. P., whose sign board faces the station dining counter and reads: 'Divorces granted during wait-over. Substitute furnished for express making up time,

at extra cost of fare to next station and return. No declaration of residence required from transients.'"

The hotel lights were long extinguished, and through the vigils of the night, Archer sat as one petrified. He pensively saw the stars pale and go out one by one before the conquering rays of the resplendent monarch of day.

The whistle of an incoming steamer reminded him of long delayed duties. He mechanically gathered his few traps, and was soon on his way to the Gulf.

"This affection of mine is purely ephemeral," he cogitated, leaning back on the cozy saloon divan, timing his words with the reverberating engine-beats, and recalling a train of pet theories, which only proved cruel mockeries in the light of his real feelings.

Two fellow travellers, whom he remembered seeing at the hotel, were seated near and audibly discussing Miss Grant.

"Yes, a splendid catch," observed one, "heiress to a good quarter-million."

"Why didn't you tell me that before. I'll take the return boat," jocularly came from the other.

"Ethel an heiress, well, that does settle everything," a hot flush suffusing his cheeks at the thought that, perhaps, she might regard him, an unknown, impecunious scribe, as a miserable mercenary. The thought was galling.

CHAPTER II.

A scout brought in word that over two hundred Cree and Stoney Indians were camped on the reserve of the former tribe about thirty-eight miles away. Poundmaker, the Cree chief, had not taken part in any open hostilities, but it was known that he and Big Bear were contemplating a coalition of forces, and that as soon as this was effected they would assume the aggressive.

Col. Otter, immediately on receipt of this intelligence, decided, if possible, to prevent the threatened union of the Indian chiefs, and ordered a reconnaissance in force. The troops left Battleford at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of May 1st, 1885. At 8 o'clock, darkness coming on, a halt was made, no special precautions being necessary to guard against surprise, as the country, consisting of a gently rolling prairie, with here and there a more prominent hummock, could be seen for miles around, and the outlying guard of Mounted Police and scouts could give the alarm on the approach of any belligerents.

The campaign, so far, had not developed any very startling engagements, and the few skirmishes with the rebels, happily were not attended with the harrowing scenes and appalling loss of life incident to a battlefield. Very few of the men had received their baptism of fire, and they were mostly in a state of ner-

vous excitement, as they apprehended that a decisive step was intended. Special orders had been issued enjoining rigid discipline.

Whilst the evening meal was in course of preparation, there was an absence of the customary jest and song, for the soldiering clerks of banking and commercial houses and the careless, merry-making student, awoke to the meaning and gravity of war.

Sydney Archer, war correspondent of the *Toronto Gazette*, was obviously not a very pleasant frame of mind. He was on his hands and knees, gazing fixed and perplexedly at a camera. During the afternoon march, the photographic instrument had not worked satisfactorily, and here he was on the eve of a prospective brush with the enemy, and, as usual, something tantalizing had to occur.

A series of very emphatic expletives on the cussedness of "buttons" and "slides" were on the verge of utterance, when a hand was lightly laid on his shoulder. Looking quickly around, he perceived Harry Seymour.

"Heavens above! What's up? See a Sioux spook?" queried Archer, as Seymour took his hand away, and stood with face ashy white, and quaking in every limb. Archer rose, and slapped Seymour on the back. "Brace up! Seymour, tell me all about it." A shiver ran through Seymour's entire anatomy, and his quivering lips made an abortive attempt at articulation. As usual in such cases of abject terror, when one finds speech, the result is an unrestrained stream of unintelligible, incoherent words. Archer stopped him in his frantic effort of explanation, and said with feigned impatience, "Oh, do speak slowly. I haven't the faintest inkling of what your gibberish is intended for." Seymour straightened up. "Ha—haven't—you—heard?" stammered Seymour, shaking as if he had the ague. "Nen-nen-nin-nin-no," mocked Archer laughingly in reply, and whipping out a flask, he held it at Seymour's lips at the same time passing his arm around Seymour's neck in a brotherly way, and saying kindly; "Take a big nip, and then we'll know all about it." The "undiluted" had the desired effect, and Seymour was his old self again, and spoke with bravado and an attempt at humor. "Things are warming up, Archer. You can look for fun in the shape of arrows, scalp and painted savages. There's no use denying that I was awfully scared. Fifty of us were drawn up in line, and told to take off our knapsacks, to inscribe our home address on them, throw them in with the baggage, and to briefly write down any parting wishes or final directions we desired sent to our relatives and friends. The cold-blooded manner in which this unpalatable information was