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BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

A NOVEL.

BY WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE, AUTHORS OF "READY-MONEY MORTIBOY,"
"THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," &c.

CHAPTER XXIX.—(Continued.)

"Since Leonard went away," he said, "which is five years to-day, as long a cruise as ever I made in the old days, I've been drawn towards this parable till I know it by heart. I've thought at times—What if Leonard were to come back like that young man, with five years' neglect of duty upon his mind? How should we have to receive him? And here I find the directions laid down plain. Lord! Lord! how plain a man's course is marked out for him, with lighthouses along the coast, and the mariner's compass, and the stars to steer by at night—if only he would use his eyes. Well, Mrs. Jeram, my dear, and Celia, and Laddy, it was clear what we all had to do. And though a dreadful thought crossed my mind when you came home without him, and beat about the bush, talking of failure and such things, which I now perceive to have been only the remains of the devilment that always hung about the lad, I went out into the passage bold, and prepared, I hope, to act according to open orders. Somehow, we generally think, when we read this Divine parable, of the young man. To-night, all through supper, I've been thinking about his father, and I have been a pitying that father. What if his boy who had been away from home for five years or thereabouts, came home to him, not as he did, in rags and disgrace, but proud and tall, bringing his sheaves with him, my dear—bringing his sheaves with him? Think of that: for I am so glad, Leonard, I am so glad and happy."

We were all silent while the good old man cleared his throat and wiped his eyes. Celia leaned her head upon his shoulder and wept unrestrainedly.

"Therefore I say," continued the Captain, "the Lord be thanked for all His mercies, and if Laddy will play the Hundredth Psalm, and Celia will sing it with him, I think it would do good, both to Mrs. Jeram and to me."

"Thank you, my children," he said, when we had finished, that we've got the decks cleared of all superfluous gear and are ship-shape, and have had supper, and drunk the champagne, and thanked God, I will light my pipe, and Celia shall mix me the customary—double ration to-night, my pretty—and you shall give us the log."

"Shall I begin at the end, sir, or at the beginning?" asked Leonard.

"The end," said Celia.

"The beginning," said the Captain, both in a breath.

"What do you say, Mrs. Jeram?" Leonard asked the old lady.

She said, crossing her hands before her, that beginning or end, it would be all the same to her; that she was quite satisfied to see him back again, and the beautifullest boy he was that God ever made—dash o' lightning about the place just as he always had a done; and she was contented, so long as she was well and happy, to wait for that story for ever, so as she could only look at him.

"What do you say, Laddy?"

"Ask the Captain," I said. "He commands this ship, but Celia is our passenger."

"Good," said the Captain. "My dear, the ship's in luck to get such a lovely passenger as you. And you shall command the ship instead of me, so long as you don't run her ashore. Now then, Leonard, the end of the log first."

"First," said Leonard, "by way of preface to my log—you remember this?"

He drew a black ribbon from his neck, with a gold ring upon it.

"A good beginning, my lad—your mother's ring."

"You remember what you said to me when you gave it to me? That it was an emblem of honour and purity among women, and that I was to wear it only so long as I could deserve it?"

"Ay—ay. This is a very good beginning of the end, Celia, my love. Go on, Leonard."

"I believe I have not forfeited the right to wear it still, sir."

"I never thought you would," said the Captain, with decision.

"Go on, my lad—keep on paying-out the line."

"Then the end is," he said, modestly, "that I bear Her Majesty's Commission, and am a Captain in the Hundred and Twentieth. We disembarked from India a week ago, and are now lying in the Old Kent Barracks in this town. Here, sir, are my medals—Alma, Inkermann, Sebastopol, and India. I have seen service since I left you, and I have gone through all the fighting without a wound or a day's illness."

"You are a combatant officer in Her Majesty's service like myself?" cried the Captain, springing to his feet.

"I am Captain Copleston, raised from the ranks by singular good fortune; and five years ago a raw recruit sitting on a wooden bench at Westminster, with all my work ahead."

"Like me, he had seen service; like me, he holds Her Majesty's Commission; like me, he can show his medals." He spread out his hands solemnly. "Children, children"—he spoke to

Celia and to me—"did we ever dare to think of this?"

CHAPTER XXX.

Then Leonard began his story. The room was lit by the single pair of candles standing on each side of the model of the *Atala* on the mantelshelf. The Captain sat with his pipe in his wooden chair, his honest red face glowing with satisfaction, and beside him Celia leaning on his shoulder and listening with rapt eyes. It was Dido listening to *Eneas*. "With varied talk did Dido prolong the night, deep were the draughts of love she drank." "Come," said she, "my guest, and tell us from the first beginning the stratagems of the enemy and the hap of our country then, and your own wanderings, for this is now the fifth summer that carries you a wanderer o'er every land and sea." As Dido wept to hear, so did Celia sigh and sob and catch her breath as Leonard told his story. No Gascou, he; but there are stories in which the hero, be he as modest as a wood nymph, needs must proclaim his heroism. And a hero at four-and-twenty is ten times as interesting as a hero of sixty.

O, talk not to me of a name great in story;
The days of our youth are the days of our glory;
And the myrtle and ivy of sweet two-and-twenty
Are worth all your laurels, though ever so plenty.

And what is it when the myrtle and ivy of two-and-twenty have real laurels mixed up with them?

A philosopher so great that people grovel before his name, in a work on the Subjection of Women, makes the astounding statement that the influence of woman has always been in the direction of peace and the avoidance of war. Pity he had not read history by the light of poetry. Was there ever, one asks in astonishment, a time when women did not love courage and strength? It was not only in the days of chivalry that young knights fought before the eyes of their mistresses—

Since doughty deeds my lady please,
Right soon I'll mount my steed
And strong his arm and fast his seat
That bears true me the deed.

How could it be otherwise? We love the qualities which most we lack. If women ceased to be gentle, tender, soft—what we call womanly—we should leave off falling in love. That is most certain. Who ever fell in love with one of the unsexed women? And I suppose if men ceased to be strong and courageous, women would leave off accepting and rejoicing in their love. Dido drank deep draughts of love listening to the tale of *Eneas*, which was, as Scarron many years afterwards remarked, extremely long and rather dull. So sat Celia listening to a much more wonderful story of a battle and endurance. Or, I thought, she was more like the gentle maid of Venice than the proud Phœnician queen. With such sweetness did Desdemona listen when the valiant Moor told of the dangers he had passed. Did she, as John Stuart Mill would have us believe, incline him to ways of peace? Quite the contrary; his sweet and gentle Desdemona wished "that Heaven had made her such a man," and when her lord must go to slay the Turk she would fain go with him. My gentle Celia wept over the brave soldiers who went forth to fight, and again over those who were brought home to die; but her heart, womanlike, was ready to open out to the most valiant.

"I went up to town," he began, "with my ten pounds, as you all know. When I arrived at Waterloo Station I discovered for the first time that I had formed no plans how to begin. The problem before me was the old difficulty, how a man with a reasonably good education and no friends had best start so as to become a gentleman. I faced that problem for a fortnight, trying to find a practical solution. I might become a clerk—and end there; a mechanical copying clerk in a City office?"

"Fudge!" said the Captain.

"Or an usher in a school—and end there."

"Fudge!" said the Captain.

"Or a strolling actor, and trust to chance to make a name for myself."

"Pshaw!" said the Captain.

"There were men, I knew, who made money writing for the papers. I thought I might write too, and I found out where they mostly resorted, and tried to talk to them. But that profession I very soon discovered wanted other qualities than I possessed. Laddy might have taken to writing; but it was not my gift."

"Right," said the Captain. "Laddy, you remember the story of my old messmate who once wrote a novel. 'Twas his ruin, poor fellow. Never lifted his head afterwards. Go on, Leonard."

"All the time I was looking about me the money, of course, was melting fast. I might have made it last longer, I dare say; but I was ignorant, and got cheated. One morning I awoke to the consciousness that there was nothing left at all except the purse. Well, sir, I declare that I was relieved. The problem was solved, because I knew then that the only line possible for me was to enlist. I went down to

Westminster and took the shilling. Of course I was too proud to enlist under any but my own name. Going a soldiering is no disgrace."

"Right," said the Captain.

"Well," he went on, "it is no use pretending I was happy at first, because the life was hard and the companionship was rough. But the drill came easy to me who had seen so many drills upon the Common, and after a bit I found myself as good a soldier as any of them. One fretted a little under the rules and the discipline; that was natural at first. There seemed too much pipeclay and too little personal ease. One or two of the sergeants were unfair on the men too, and bore little spite. Some of the officers were martinetts; I offended one because I refused to become a servant."

"You a servant, Leonard?" cried Celia.

He laughed.

"The officers like a smart lad; but it was not to be a valet that I enlisted, and I refused, as a good many others refused. Our lads were mostly sturly Lancashire boys, proud of being soldiers, but had not enlisted to black other men's boots. It makes me angry now—which is absurd—to think that I should have been asked to become a lackey. Well, it was a hard life, that in the ranks. Not the discipline, nor the work, nor the drill,—though these were hard enough. It was the roughness of the men. There were one or two gentlemen among us—one fellow who had been an officer in the Rifles—but they were a hopeless lot, who kept up as best they could the vices which had ruined them. They were worse than any of the rough rollicking countryside lads. I can't say I had much room for hope in those days, Celia."

She reddened, but said nothing. I remembered, suddenly, what he might mean.

"Things looked about as black for a few months as they well could. Rough work, rough food, rough campaigning. I thought of Cole-ridge and his adventures as a private, but he turned back while I—for there was nothing else to do—resolved to keep on. And then bit by bit, one got to like it. For one thing, I could do all sorts of things better than most men—my training with the Poles came in there. It was found that I could fence; it got about that I played cricket, and I was put in the eleven—to play in the matches of the regiment, officers and men together; once, when we had a little row with each other, it was found that I could handle my fists, which always gains a man respect. And then they came to call me Gentleman Jack; and, as I heard afterwards, the officers got to know it, and the Colonel kept his eye upon me. Of course one may wear the soldier's jacket very well without falling into any of the pits which are temptations to these poor fellows, so that it was easy enough getting the good conduct stripe and to be even made corporal. The first proud day, however, was that when I was made a sergeant, with as good a knowledge of my work, I believe, as any sergeant in the line."

Mrs. Jeram shook her head. "More," she said, "much more."

"A sergeant," said Leonard. "It sounds so little now, but to me, then, it seemed so much. The first real step upwards out of the rank. The old dream that I should return triumphant somehow was gone long since, or it was a dream that had no longer any faith belonging to it. And I began to say to myself that to win my way after two years to a sergeant's stripes was perhaps as much honour as Providence intended for me."

The Captain murmured something about mysterious ways. Then he patted Celia's head tenderly, and begged Leonard to keep on his course.

"Well," said Leonard, "you have heard how the great luck began. It was just before the Crimean War that I got the stripes. We were among the first regiments ordered. How well I remember embarking at this very place, half afraid and half hoping, to see you all, but I did not."

"We were there, Leonard," said Celia, "when the first troops embarked. I think I remember them all going."

"It is a solemn thing," Leonard went on, "going off to war. It is not only that your life is to be hazarded—every man hazards his life at all sorts of ways as much as on a battlefield—but you feel that you are going to help in adding another chapter to the history of the world."

"Ay," said the Captain. "History means war."

"Let us pass over the first two or three months. We went to Valona, where we lost many men needlessly by cholera, waiting till the Generals could make up their minds. I suppose they could not avoid the delay, but it was a bad thing for the rank and file, and we were all right glad when the orders came to embark for the Crimea. We were amongst the earliest to land, and my first experience of fighting was at Alma. One gets used to the bullets after a bit; but the first time—you know, Captain—"

The Captain nodded.

"After Alma we might, as we knew very well, have pushed straight on to Sebastopol. I doubt whether that would have finished the war, which had to be fought out somewhere. Russia had to learn that an immense army is not by itself proof of immense power. And so it was just as well, I believe, that we moved as we did."

"You know all about the battles—the Alma, Inkermann, Balaklava, and the rest. Our fellows went through most of the fighting, and, of course, I with the rest. The hardest day was Inkermann. We had just come in at daybreak from the trenches, where we had been on duty for four-and-twenty hours, when we were turned out to fight in the fog and rain. We fought in

our great coats—well—all that is history. But the days of battle were red-letter days for all of us, and what tried us most was inaction, and the dreary waiting work in the trenches. And yet it was that work which got me my commission."

"You know what it was we had to do. Before the Redan and the Malakoff were our batteries, the French attack on the Mamelon and the Malakoff was on our right. Separating our right from our left attack was the valley which they called the Valley of the Shadow of Death, along which they carried the wounded, and where the Russian shells, which went over the Twenty-one Gun Battery fell and rolled till the place was literally paved with shells. It was a dangerous way by which to carry wounded men, and at night the troops went down by the Woronzow Road. It was easy work comparatively in the battery; you could see the shells flying over, and long before they fell you had plenty of time to dodge behind the next traverse; after a while, too, a man got to know exactly if a cannon shot was making in his direction; sometimes the bombardment went on for days on both sides without any apparent result. There was the Naval Brigade—you would have liked to see them, Captain, in the Twenty-one Gun Battery under Captain Keel, the coolest officer in the whole Navy—they were handier with the guns, and a great deal readier than our men."

"In front of the battery were the trenches, and in advance of the trenches were the rifle pits. You could see before the venomous little Russian pits out of which so many brave fellows were killed, dotted about with sandbags, and where the Russians lay watching our men working from parallel to parallel, and in the zigzags. There was one rifle pit, in particular—I shall come to it directly—which gave us more annoyance than any other, on account of its position. It was close to the Quarries. The fire from it interfered with the approach of our trenches, and we had lost our men in numbers in the advanced sap at this point. It was for the moment the *bête noire* of our engineer officers. Of course you have read in the papers what sort of work we have had in the trenches. On a quiet night, when the batteries were silent and the weather fair, it was pleasant enough. We sat round a fire smoking, telling yarns, or even sleeping, but always with the guns in readiness. In wet and bad weather it was a different thing, however. Remember that we only had ammunition boots, made by contract, which gave out after a week. The mud got trodden about deeper and deeper, till it was pretty well up to the knees; and when snow fell on top of it, and rain on top of that, and all became a wet pool of thick brown mud, it was about as lively work as wading up and down the harbour at low tide, even if you did happen to have a "rabbit," that is, one of the coats lined with white fur. And if it was a hot night you had the pleasure of listening to the cannonade, and could see nothing on the Russian side but the continuous flash of the guns. And there was always the excitement of a possible sortie."

"We went out for night work in the trenches with heavy hearts, I can tell you, and many a man wished it were day again, and he was back in safety. We grew every day more badly off, too. Not only did the boots give out, but the great coats dropped to pieces, and the commissariat fell short. You have heard all that story, Jack, of the Naval Brigade did not mind so much as regards the great coats, because he could patch and mend. He used to sell his shops for brandy, and cobble his old garments with the brown canvass of the sandbags. But the red coats were not so handy—I have often thought it a great pity that our fellows don't imitate the sailors, and learn how to do things for themselves—we suffered terribly. That you know, too; and any national conceitedness about the pluck of our fellows in fighting so well under such conditions has to be pulled up by the thought that what we did the French and Russians did, too. After all, there is no such thing as one nation being braver than another."

"Our sailors were stronger than the French," said the Captain. "When it came to pounding with the big guns, they held out longer."

"Let me come to my piece of great good fortune," Leonard went on, "or I shall be talking all night. I have told you of the rifle-pit by the Quarries which caused us such a lot of trouble. Now I am going to tell you how I took it. It was an afternoon in April, 1855. We were in the trenches; there had been joking with a lot of 'griffs,' young recruits just out from England; the men used to show them the immense wooden spoons with which the Russian soldiers ate their coarse black bread soaked in water, and declare, to Johnny Raw's terror, that the Russians had mouths to correspond. At that time the fighting between rifle-pits was the great feature of the siege, and to take a rifle-pit was one of the most deadly things possible, as it was also the most important. The 'griffs,' went down to the most advanced trench; some of them had never been under fire before, and they were naturally nervous. Just after grog time—their grog had been taken down to them—a heavy firing began, and one of those curious panics which sometimes seize some veteran soldiers attacked these boys, and they bolted; left the trench and skulked back along the zigzag, declaring that the enemy was out in force. That was nonsense, and I was ordered down with a dozen men to take their place. My fellows, I remember, chuckled at finding the grog still there, and made short work of it."

"We had not been in the trench very long before a sortie in force actually took place. We were in front of the Redan; before us, under the