

HELEN MOIR

OR LOVE AND HONOUR.

A TALE OF THE CLYDE.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Here the scene of the battle then progressing burst on his sight in all its dreadful grandeur, revealed through the darkness by the flashes of cannon, the fiery course of rockets, the hurrying forth of exploding shells, and blazing houses which accident or design had wrought in conflagration.

As Edwin drew nearer to the front he encountered flying horses and flying men—some helping the wounded along, and others rushing at headlong pace as if in a panic.

But now it was that the well-known tactics of the Germans came again into play, and with the same successful result. At the last moment reserves were brought up in immense numbers—hosts of men, thousands upon thousands, fresh and unexhausted—and these were hurled with restless might against the weary worn-out French, causing them to turn and flee with all speed in the direction of Metz.

Thus at nine o'clock at night the long and bloody battle of Gravelotte was ended. The French had retired to the heights of Mont St. Quentin and Plappeville; "The Prussians held the heights beyond the Bois de Yanx—heights which commanded the surrounding country up to the limits of the gun ranges of Metz. The battlefield was canopied by a long earth-bound cloud, with two vast fire-burning houses—at each end of it. The day had been beautiful, and now the star looked down with splendour, except where the agony and death had clouded the glow of Heaven."

The further Edwin made his way into the region of the strife, the more the doleful were the accounts he received of the frenzied slaughter which had taken place. Whole regiments had been cut up, and some of the shattered remnants were altogether without officers.

"The 33d," gasped Edwin, to one of his informants—"know ye how it has fared?" "Badly enough, I should say, for it and the 69th were in the hottest of the fight."

"Where was that?" asked Edwin with a quaking heart. "In the valley of St. Hubert, just below Moselane. Take the road to the right; go on for a mile and you will reach it."

Away dashed Edwin, his heart beating fearfully as he rushed on past the groups which were moving about with anxiety and excitement, and never stopping till he came to the vicinity of several houses standing near the wayside. Lights burned brightly in all the windows, and numerous soldiers moved about the doors, while large groups lay here and there upon the ground—groans and cries of pain giving the sad intimation that these were wounded.

Edwin ran breathlessly into the first gleam of light which streamed out upon the road, and the first person he came against was a man of the 33rd leaning against the wall. "What of your regiment?" he eagerly demanded.

The man sadly shook his head. "Ah, Herr Allerton," he replied for he was one of Herman's Company, and knew Edwin—"it is sore cut up, sore cut up."

"And Lieutenant Rheinbach?" faltered Edwin, his tongue scarcely able to form the words. "He fell before dark. I saw him go down."

"Dead!—oh God, is he dead?" "No; I don't think so. I saw them carry him past, and I did not think he was quite dead."

"Where have they carried him to?" "Into the hospital here, most likely. A great many have been brought there, and the doctor and nurses are attending them."

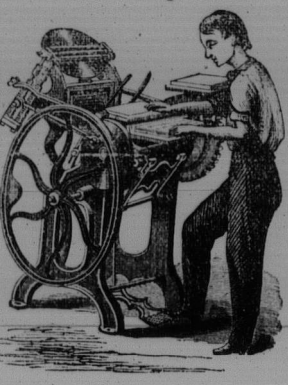
Hardly waiting to hear the last words, Edwin, with a wild gesture, bounded to the open door of the building which the soldier had indicated, and flew along the passage to a long room, on the threshold of which he met a doctor coming out.

"Lieutenant Rheinbach is among the wounded—is he here?" he wildly enquired. "Yes, he is here—on the pallet in your corner. A nurse is attending him."

Faint and bloody forms lay in rows upon the floor, and between these rows Edwin walked to the far end of the room, where Hermann had laid. As he drew near he saw him lying still and unconscious, and a woman was bending over him in tender attitude, bathing his white brow with her snowy handkerchief.

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No. 1, Wyndham Street. Guelph, April 25, 1872.

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