

HIS SOMBRE RIVALS.

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"OPENING A CHESTNUT BURN,"

"WITHOUT A HOME," ETC.

"My story has already been much too long. From the daily journals you have learned pretty accurately what occurred after we reached Centerville. Richardson's and Blenker's brigades made a quiet and orderly retreat when all danger to the main body was over. The sick and wounded were left behind with spoils enough to equip a good-sized Confederate army. I followed the headquarters escort, and eventually made my way into Washington in the drenching rain of Monday, and found the city crowded with fugitives to whom the loyal people were extending unbounded hospitality. I felt ill and feverish, and yielded to the impulse to reach home; and I never acted more wisely.

"Now you have the history of my first battle; and may I never see one like it again. And yet I believe the battle of Bull Run will become one of the most interesting studies of American history and character. On our side it was not directed by generals, according to the rules of war. It was fought by Northern men after their own fashion and according to their native genius; and I shall ever maintain that it was fought far better than could have been expected of militia who knew less of the practical science of war than of the philosophy of Plato.

"The moral of my story, Hilland, scarcely needs pointing; and it applies to us both. When we go, let us go as soldiers; and if we have only a corporal's command, let us lead soldiers. The grand Northern onset of which you have dreamed so long has been made. You have seen the result. You have the means and the ability to equip and command a regiment. Infuse into it your own spirit; and at the same time make it a machine that will hold together as long as you have a man left."

"Graham," said Hilland, slowly and deliberately, "there is no resisting the logic of events. You have convinced me of my error, and I shall follow your advice."

"And, Grace," concluded Graham, "believe me, by so doing he adds tenfold to his chances of living to a good old age."

"Yes," she said, looking at him gratefully through tear-dimmed eyes. "You have convinced me of that also."

"Instead of rushing off to some out-of-the-way place or camp, he must spend months in recruiting and drilling his men; and you can be with him."

"Oh, Alford!" she exclaimed. "is that the heavenly logic of your long, terrible story?"

"It's the rational logic; you could not expect any other kind from me."

"Well, Graham!" ejaculated the major, with a long sigh of relief, "I wouldn't have missed your account of the battle for a year's pay. And mark my words, young men, you may not live to see it, or I either, but the North will win in this fight. That's the fact that I'm convinced of in spite of the panic."

"The fact that I'm convinced of," said Mrs. Mayburn brusquely, mopping her eyes meanwhile, "is that Alford needs rest. I'm going to take him home at once." And the young man seconded her in spite of all protestations.

"Dear, vigilant old aunty," said Graham, when they were alone, "you know when I have reached the limit of endurance."

"Ah! Alford, Alford," moaned the poor woman, "I fear you are seeking death in this war."

Hilland, with characteristic modesty, would not take the colonelcy of the regiment that he chiefly had raised; but secured for the place a fine officer of the regular army, and contented himself with a captaincy. "Efficiency of the service is what I am aiming at," he said. "I would much rather rise by merit from the ranks than command a brigade by favor."

Unlike many men of wealth, he had a noble repugnance to taking any public advantage of it; and the numerous officers of the time that had obtained their positions by influence were his detestation.

Graham's predictions in regard to Grace were fulfilled. For long months she saw her husband almost daily, and had it not been for the cloud that hung over the future, it would have been one of the happiest periods of her life. She saw Hilland engaged in tasks that brought him a deep and growing satisfaction. She saw her father in his very element. There were no more days of dulness and weariness for him. The daily journals teemed with subjects of interest, and with their aid he planned innumerable campaigns. Military men were coming and going, and with these young officers the veteran was an oracle. He gave Hilland much shrewd advice; and even when it was not good, it was listened to with deference, and so the result was just as agreeable to the major.

What sweeter joy is there for the aged than to sit in the seat of judgment and counsel, and feel that the world would go awry were it not for the guidance and aid of their experience! Alas for the poor old major, and those like him! The world does not grow old as they do. It only changes and becomes more vast and complicated. What was wisest and best in their day becomes often as antiquated as the culverin that once defended castellated ramparts.

Happily the major had as yet no suspicion of this; and when he and Grace accompanied Hilland and his regiment to Washington, the measure of his content was full. There he could daily meet other veterans of the regular service; and in listening to their talk, one might imagine that McClellan had only to attend their sittings to learn how to subdue the rebellion within a few months. These veterans were not bitter partisans. General Robert E. Lee was "Bob Lee" to them; and the other chiefs of the Confederacy were spoken of by some familiar sobriquet, acquired in many instances when boys at West Point. They would have fought these old friends and acquaintances to the bitter end, according to the tactics of the old school; but after the battle, those that survived would have hobnobbed together over a bottle of wine as if they had been companions in arms.

He looked at her tenderly for a moment, and then said, "Hereafter I will try to take no greater risks than a soldier's duties require."

CHAPTER XXII.

SELF-SENTENCED.

Days, weeks, and months with their changes came and went. Hilland, with characteristic promptness, carried out his friend's suggestion; and through his own means and personal efforts, in great measure, recruited and equipped a regiment of cavalry. He was eager that his friend should take a command in it; but Graham firmly refused.

"Our relations are too intimate for discipline," he said. "We might be placed in situations wherein our friendship would embarrass us."

Grace surmised that he had another reason; for, as time passed, she saw less and less of him. He had promptly obtained a lieutenantcy in a regiment that was being recruited at Washington; and by the time her husband's regiment reached that city, the more disciplined organization to which Graham was attached was ordered out on the Virginia picket line beyond Arlington Heights.

Mrs. Mayburn accompanied the major's party to Washington, for, as she said, she was "hungry for a sight of her boy." As often as his duties permitted, Graham rode in from the front to see her. But it began to be noticed that after these visits he ever sought some perilous duty on the picket line, or engaged in some dash at the enemy or guerrillas in the vicinity. He could not visit his aunt without seeing Grace, whose tones were now so gentle when she spoke to him, and so full of her heart's deep gratitude, that a renewal of his old fierce fever of unrest was the result. He was already gaining a reputation for extreme daring, combined with unusual coolness and vigilance; and before the campaign of '62 opened he had been promoted to a first lieutenantcy.

Time passed; the angry torrent of the war broadened and deepened. Men and measures that had stood out like landmarks were engulfed and forgotten.

It goes without saying that the friends did their duty in camp and field. There were no more panics. The great organizer, McClellan, had made soldiers of the vast army; and had he been retained in the service as the creator of armies for other men to lead, his labors would have been invaluable.

At last, to the deep satisfaction of Graham and Hilland, their regiments were brigaded together, and they frequently met. It was then near the

close of the active operations of '62, and the friends now ranked as Captain Graham and Major Hilland. Notwithstanding the reverses suffered by the Union arms, the young men's confidence was unabated as to the final issue. Hilland had passed through several severe conflicts, and his name had been mentioned by reason of his gallantry, and Grace began to feel that fate could never be so cruel as to destroy her very life in his life. She saw that her father exulted more over her husband's soldierly qualities than in all his wealth; and although they spent the summer heat as usual at the seaside with Mrs. Mayburn, the hearts of all three were following two regiments through the forests and fields of Virginia. Half a score of journals were daily searched for items concerning them, and the arrival of the mails was the event of the day.

There came a letter in the autumn which filled the heart of Grace with immeasurable joy and very, very deep sadness. Mrs. Mayburn was stricken to the heart, and would not be comforted, while the old Major swore and blessed God by turns.

The cause was this. The brigade with which the friends were connected was sent on a reconnaissance, and they felt the enemy strongly before retiring, which at last they were compelled to do precipitately. It so happened that Hilland commanded the rear-guard. In an advance he ever led; on a retreat he was apt to keep well to the rear. In the present instance the pursuit had been prompt and determined, and had been compelled to make more than one repelling charge to prevent the retiring column from being pressed too hard. His command had thus lost heavily, and at last overwhelming numbers drove them back at a gallop.

Graham, in the rear of the main column, which had just crossed a small wooden bridge over a wide ditch or little run through the fields, saw the headlong retreat of Hilland's men, and he instantly deployed his company that he might check the close pursuit by a volley. As the Union troops neared the bridge it was evidently a race for life and liberty, for they were outnumbered ten to one. In a few moments they began to pour over, but Hilland did not leave. They were nearly all across, but their commander was not among them; and Graham was wild with anxiety as he sat on his horse at the right of his line waiting to give the order to fire. Suddenly, in the falling light of the evening, he saw Hilland with his right arm hurling himself, spurring his horse badly-blown; while gaining fast upon him were four savage-looking Confederates, their sabres emitting a steel,

deadly sheen, and uplifted to strike the moment they could reach him.

With the rapidity of light, Graham's eye measured the distance between his friend and the bridge, and his instantaneous conviction was that Hilland was doomed, for he could not order a volley without killing him almost to a certainty. At that supreme crisis, the suggestion passed through his mind like a lurid flash, "In a few moments Hilland will be dead, and Grace may yet be mine."

Then, like an avenging demon, the thought confronted him. He saw it in its true aspect, and in an outburst of self-accusing fury he passed the death sentence on himself. Snatching out the long, straight sword he carried, he struck with the spur the noble horse he bestrode, gave him the rein, and made straight for the deep, wide ditch. There was no time to go around by the bridge, which was still impeded by the last of the fugitives.

His men held their breath as they saw his purpose. The feat seemed impossible; but as his steed cleared the chasm by a magnificent bound, a loud cheer rang down the line. The next moment Hilland, who had mentally said farewell to his wife, saw Graham passing him like a thunderbolt. There was an immediate clash of steel, and then the foremost pursuer was down, cleft to the jaw. The next shared the same fate; for Graham, in what he deemed his death struggle, had almost ceased to be human. His spirit, stung to a fury that it had never known and would never know again, blazed in his eyes and flashed in the lightning play of his sword. The two other pursuers reined up their steeds and sought to attack him on either side. He threw his own horse back almost upon its haunches, and was on his guard, meaning to strike home the moment the fence of his opponents permitted. At this instant, however, there were a dozen shots from the swarming Rebels, that were almost upon him, and he and his horse were soon to fall to the ground. Meantime Hilland had instinctively tried to rein in his horse, that he might return to the help of his friend, although from his wound he could render no aid. Some of his own men who had crossed the bridge, and in a sense of safety had regained their wits, saw his purpose, and dashing back, they formed a body-guard around him, and dragged his horse swiftly beyond the line of battle.

A yell of anger accompanied by a volley came from Graham's men that he had left in line, and a dozen Confederate saddles were emptied; but their return fire was so deadly, and their numbers were so overwhelming, that the officer next in command ordered retreat at a gallop. Hilland, in his anguish, would not have left his friend; had not his men grasped his rein and carried him off almost by force. Meanwhile the darkness set in so rapidly that the pursuit soon slackened and ceased.

During the remainder of the ride back to their camp, which was reached late at night, the ardent-natured Hilland was almost demented; he wept, raved, and swore; he called himself an accursed coward that he had left the friend who had saved his life; his broken arm was as nothing to him, and eventually the regimental surgeon had to give strong opiates to quiet him.

When late the next day he awoke, it all came back to him with a dull, heavy ache at heart. Nothing could be done. His mind, now restored to its balance, recognized the fact. The brigade was under orders to move to another point, and he was disabled and compelled to take a leave of absence until fit for duty. The inexorable mechanism of military life moves on, without the slightest regard for the individual; and Graham's act was only one of the many heroic deeds of the war, some seen and more unnoticed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EARLY DEATH FULFILLED.

A few days later Grace welcomed her husband with a long, close embrace, but with streaming eyes; while he bow-