

HIS SOMBRE RIVALS.

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"OPENING A CHESTNUT BURR,"

"WITHOUT A HOME," ETC.

the discipline and coolness. As I rode here and there I could see that they were erect, eager, and that their eyes began to glow like coals from their dusty sunburnt visages. If there were occasional evidences of fear, there were more of resolution and desire and eagerness for the fray.

"The aspect of affairs on the ridge, where the enemy awaited us, did not grow encouraging. With my glass I could see reinforcements coming up rapidly during our delay. New guns were seeking position, which was scarcely taken before there was a puff of smoke and their iron message, Heavens! what a vicious sound those shells had! something between a whizz and a shriek. Even the horses would cringe and shudder when one passed over them, and the men would duck their heads, though the missile was thirty feet in the air. I suppose there was some awfully wild firing on both sides; but I saw several of our men carried to the rear. But all this detail is an old, old story to you, major."

"Yes, an old story, but one that can never lose its fierce charm. I see it all as you describe it. Go on, and omit nothing you can remember of the scene. Mrs. Mayburn looks as grim as one of your cannon; and Grace, my child, you won't flinch, will you?"

"No, papa."

"That's my brave wife's child. She often said, 'Tell me all. I wish to know just what you have passed through.'"

A brief glance assured Graham that her father's spirit was then supreme, and that she looked with woman's admiration on a scene replete with the manhood woman most admires.

"I cannot describe to you the battle, as such," continued Graham. "I can only outline faintly the picture I saw dimly through dust and smoke from my own standpoint. Being under no one's orders I could go where I pleased, and I tried to find the vital points. Of course, there was much heavy fighting that I saw nothing of, movements unknown to me or caught but imperfectly. During the preliminary conflict I remained on the right of Burnside's command near the Sudley Road, by which our army had reached the field."

"When at last his troops began to press forward, their advance was decided and courageous; but the enemy held their own stubbornly. The fighting was severe and deadly, for we were now within easy musket range. At one time I trembled for Burnside's lines, and I saw one of his aids gallop furiously to the rear for help. It came almost immediately in the form of a fine body of regulars under Major Sykes; and our wavering lines were rendered firm and more aggressive than ever. At the same time it was evident that our forces were going into action off to the right of the Sudley Road, and that another battery had opened on the enemy. I afterward learned that they were Rickett's guns. Under this increasing and relentless pressure the enemy's lines were seen to waver. Wild cheers went up from our ranks, and such is the power of the human voice—the echo direct from the heart—that these shouts rose above the roar of the cannon, the crash of musketry, and thrilled every nerve and fibre. Onward pressed our men; the Rebel lines yielded, broke, and our foes retreated down the hill, but at a dogged, stubborn pace, fighting as they went. Seeing the direction they were taking, I dashed into the Sudley Road, near which I had kept as the centre of opera-

tions. At the intersection of this road with the Warrenton Turnpike was a stone house, and behind this the enemy rallied, as if determined to retreat no farther. I had scarcely observed this fact when I saw a body of men forming in the road just above me. In a few moments they were in motion. On they came, a relentless human torrent with a roar of hoarse shouts and cries. I was carried along with them; but before we reached the stone house the enemy broke and fled, and the whole Rebel line was swept back half a mile or more. "Thus you see that in the first severe conflict of the day, and when pitted against numbers comparatively equal, we won a decided victory."

Both the major and Hilland drew a long breath of relief; and the former said, "I have been hasty and unjust in my censure. If that raw militia could be made to fight at all, it can in time be made to fight well. Mr. Graham, you have deeply gratified an old soldier to-night by describing scenes that carry me back to the grand era of my life. I believe I was born to be a soldier; and my old companions stand in my memory like sun-lighted mountain-tops. Forgive such high-flown talk,—I know it's not like me,—but I've had to-night some of my old battle excitement. I never thought to feel it again. We'll hear the rest of your story to-morrow. I outrank you all, by age at least; and I now order 'taps.'"

Graham was not sorry, for in strong reaction a sudden sense of almost mortal weakness overcame him. Even the presence of Grace, for whose sake, after all, he had unconsciously told his story, could not sustain him any longer, and he sank back looking very white.

"You have over-exerted yourself," she said gently, coming to his side. "You should have stopped when I cautioned you; or rather, we should have been more thoughtful."

"Perhaps I have overrated my strength, —it's a fault of mine," was his smiling reply. "I shall be perfectly well after a night's rest."

He had looked up at her as he spoke; and in that moment of weakness there was a wistful, hungry look in his eyes that smote her heart.

A shallow, silly woman, or an intensely selfish one, would have exulted. Here was a man, cool, strong, and masterful among other men,—a man who had gone to the other side of the globe to escape her power,—one who within the last few days had witnessed a battle with the quiet poise that enabled him to study it as an artist or a tactician; and yet he could not keep his eyes from betraying the truth that there was something within his heart stronger than himself.

Did Grace Hilland lay this flattering unction to her soul? No. She went away inexpressibly sad. She felt that two battle scenes had been presented to her mind; and the conflict that had been waged silently, patiently, and unceasingly in a strong man's soul had to her the higher elements of heroism. It was another of those wretched problems offered by this imperfect world for which there seems no remedy.

When Hilland hastened over to see his friend and add a few hearty words to those he had already spoken, he was told that he was sleeping.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LOGIC OF EVENTS.

Graham was right in his prediction that another night's rest would carry him far on the road to recovery; and he insisted, when Hilland called in the morning, that the major should remain in his accustomed chair at home, and listen to the remainder of the story. "My habit of life is so active," he said, "that a little change will do me good;" and so it was arranged. By leaning on Hilland's shoulder he was able to limp the short distance between the cottages; and found that Grace had made every arrangement for his comfort on the

piazza, where the major welcomed him with almost the eagerness of a child for whom an absorbing story is to be continued.

"You can't know how you interested us all last night," Grace began. "I never knew papa to be more gratified; and as for Warren, he could not sleep for excitement. Where did you learn to tell stories?"

"I was said to be very good at fiction when a boy, especially when I got into scrapes. But you can't expect in this garish light any such effects as I may have created last evening. It requires the mysterious power of night and other conditions to secure a glamour; and so you must look for the blindest prose to-day."

"Indeed, Graham, we scarcely know what to expect from you any more," Hilland remarked. "From being a quiet cynic philosopher, content to delve in old libraries like the typical bookworm, you become an indefatigable sportsman, horse-tamer, explorer of the remote parts of the earth, and last, and strangest, a newspaper correspondent who doesn't know that the place to see and write about battles is several miles in the rear. What will you do next?"

"My future will be redeemed from the faintest trace of eccentricity. I shall do what about a million other Americans will do eventually,—go into the army."

"Ah! now you talk sense, and I am with you. I shall be ready to go as soon as you are well enough."

"I doubt it."

"I don't."

"Grace, what do you say to all this?" turning a troubled look upon the wife.

"I foresee that, like my mother, I am to be the wife of a soldier," she replied with a smile, while tears stood in her eyes. "I did not marry Warren to destroy his sense of manhood."

"You see, Graham, how it is. You also perceive what a knight I must be to be worthy of the lady I leave in bower."

"Yes; I see it all too well. But I must misquote Shakespeare to you, and 'charge you to stand on the order of your going;' and I think the rest of my story will prove that I have good reason for the charge."

"I should have been sorry," said the major, "to have had Grace marry a man who would consult only ease and safety in times like these. It will be awfully hard to have him go. But the time may soon come when it would be harder for Grace to have him stay; that is, if she is like her mother. But what's the use of looking at the gloomy side? I've been in a dozen battles; and here I am to plague the world yet. But now for the story. You left off, Mr. Graham, at the rout of the first rebel line of battle."

"And this had not been attained," resumed Graham, "without loss to our side. Colonel Hunter, who commanded the second division, you remember, was so severely wounded by a shell that he had to leave the field early in the action. Colonel Slocum, of one of the Rhode Island regiments, was mortally wounded, and his major had his leg crushed with a cannon ball which at the same time killed his horse. Many others were wounded and must have had a hard time of it, poor fellows, that hot day. As for the dead that strewed the ground—their troubles were over."

"But not the troubles of those that loved them," said Grace, bitterly.

Graham turned hastily away. When a moment later he resumed his narrative, she noticed that his eyes were moist and his tones husky.

"Our heaviest loss was in the demoralization of some of the regiments engaged. They appeared to have so little cohesion that one scared all the time that they might crumble away into mere human atoms."

"The affair continually took on a larger aspect, as more troops became engaged. We had driven the Confederates down a gentle slope, across a small stream called Young's Branch, and up a hill beyond and to the south. This position was higher and stronger than any they had yet occupied. On the crest of the hill were two houses; and

the enemy could be seen forming a line extending from one to the other. They were evidently receiving reinforcements rapidly. I could see gray columns hastening forward and deploying; and I've no doubt that many of the fugitives were rallied beyond this line. Meanwhile, I was informed that Tyler's Division, left in the morning at Stono Bridge, had crossed the Run in obedience to McDowell's orders, and were on the field at the left of our line. Such, as far as I could judge, was the position of affairs between twelve and one, although I can give you only my impressions. It appeared to me that our men were fighting well, gradually and steadily advancing, and closing in upon the enemy. Still, I cannot help feeling that if we had followed up our success by the determined charge of one brigade that would hold together, the hill might have been swept, and victory made certain."

"I had taken my position near Rickett's and Griffin's batteries on the right of our line, and decided to follow them up, not only because they were doing splendid work, but also for the reason that they would naturally be given commanding positions at vital points. By about two o'clock we had occupied the Warrenton turnpike; and we justly felt that much had been gained. The Confederates, lying between the two houses on the hill had given way, and from the sounds we heard they must have been driven back also by a charge on our extreme left. Indeed, there was scarcely anything to be seen of the foe that thus far had been not only seen but felt."

"From a height near the batteries where I stood the problem appeared somewhat clear to me. We had driven the enemy up and over a hill of considerable altitude, and across an uneven plateau, and they were undoubtedly in the woods beyond, a splendid position which commanded the entire open space over which we must advance to reach them. They were in cover; we should be in full view in all efforts to dislodge them. Their very reverses had secured for them a position worth half a dozen regiments; and I trembled as I thought of our raw militia advancing under conditions that would try the courage of veterans. You remember that if Washington, in the Revolution, could get his new recruits behind a rail-fence they thought they were safe."

"Well, there was no help for it. The hill and the plateau must be crossed under a point-blank fire, in order to reach the enemy, and that, too, by men who had been under arms since midnight, and the majority wearied by a long march under a blazing sun."

"About half past two, when the assault began, a strange and ominous quiet rested on the field. As I have said, the enemy had disappeared. The men scarcely knew what to think of it; and in some a false confidence, speedily dispelled, was begotten. Rickett's battery was moved down across the valley to the top of a hill just beyond the residence owned and occupied by a Mrs. Henry. I followed and entered the house, already shattered by shot and shell, curious to know whether it was occupied, and by whom. Pitiful to relate, I found that Mrs. Henry was a widow and a helpless invalid. The poor woman was in a mortal terror; and it was my hope to return and carry her to some place of safety, but the swift and deadly tide of war gave me no chance."

"Rickett's battery was scarcely unlimbered before death was busy among his cannoners and even his horses. The enemy had not only the cover of the woods, but a second growth of pines, which fringed them and completely concealed the Rebel sharpshooters. When a man fell nothing could be seen but a puff of smoke. These little jets and wreaths of smoke encircled us, and I think it speaks well for officers and men that they not only did their duty, but that Griffin's battery also came up, and that both batteries held their own against a terrific point-blank fire from the Rebel cannon, which certainly exceeded ours in num-