

The Story Page

A Scar and a Story.

"Didn't you ever get a shot when you were in the army?"

"Yes, Fred," replied Uncle Cloyde, who had been thrilling his nephew with stories on the war. "Yes, I was shot just once; and it was in my first fight, too."

"I guess it wasn't a very bad wound. You brought both your arms and your legs back with you, and you don't even limp," remarked the lad, as though he considered that soldier a failure who would exhibit neither an empty sleeve nor a cork leg. "Haven't you even a scar in any place?"

Uncle Cloyde smiled a queer smile. "Yes, I've got one scar," he answered.

Fred gave a sigh of satisfaction. "I should think a soldier would be proud of a scar he got fighting for his country. Where is your scar, uncle?"

Uncle Cloyde stood up, turned slowly round and lifted off his army hat.

"I am not proud of my scar, Fred. I keep it hidden when I can; but you shall see it and hear how it came to be there."

Fred, looking and listening, saw his uncle's forehead traveling down the back of his head and pushing aside his dark hair. There, plain and distinct, was a smooth little path of skin, white and shiny, about two inches long.

A look of astonished disappointment clouded the boy's face.

"Why uncle, what were you doing to get shot in the back of your head?"

Again the same peculiar smile showed in Uncle Cloyde's eyes.

"Fred, you will never see war, I hope; and yet your chances to show yourself a hero will come just the same. When this time does come, you will have to choose, perhaps, between standing alone for what you know is right, or turning your back on duty as 'the rest' do. In my first fight I ran away because 'the rest' did, and ever since I have carried a scar that I am ashamed to own. You shall hear the story. When a time comes for you to stand alone for what is right, remember it."

"At the time I enlisted in the army, 35 years ago, most of my comrades were young fellows who, like me, were eager to be sent to the front and learn what real war meant. But instead of this our company, with others, was ordered away from the main body of troops, to occupy and hold a little wooded valley, which it was thought the Confederates would try to capture. Days passed, and weeks, but no attack was made; no sign of a Confederate appeared. Nothing more exciting came to us than our everyday military drill and target practice. It was a tedious time, and our men began to think they were never to know what fighting meant. One of our boys was a little fellow from Illinois; just a schoolboy he was, who had enlisted when only sixteen."

"Only four years older than I am now," remarked Fred.

"There were others as young, but he was a pink-cheeked, curly-headed lad, so small and girlish-looking, that we all petted him and poked fun at him and called all sorts of unsoldierly nicknames: Sissy and Shorty, Dolly and so on."

"Didn't it make him mad?" inquired Fred.

Uncle Cloyde, shaking his head, went on with his story.

"It was just after daybreak one fresh June morning, and while our boys were joking and grumbling over theirhardtack and coffee and the prospect of another dull day, that suddenly the blue sky over our heads was blotted out with rushing clouds of smoke, and from the hilltop came the flashing and crashing of guns. Then, bursting through the smoky clouds, shouting and yelling as they came, down the hillside swarmed the Confederate soldiers."

"A deep stream flowed through the valley, and from behind the trees and brush that lined its opposite bank, the Confederates fired again upon us. It was all so sudden, so utterly unexpected, that at the first sounds of attack our men stared, startled, into one another's faces; then, as bullets whizzed around us, and some of our poor fellows dropped bleeding, every feeling, but terror and a sense of our danger, left us, and like animals frantic with fear we ran for our lives. Through the woods we rushed, dropping down behind stumps and bushes, as we sought shelter from the Confederate bullets. My own legs were carrying me toward a great tree that seemed to offer an escape when, all at once, I dropped helpless. A bullet had caught me on the back of my head, plowed a furrow along my scalp and glanced off without sinking into the bone."

"It must have stunned me for a few seconds; but a moment later I heard the firing of a third volley from the far side of the creek—though it seemed frightfully near then—and the shouting of the Confederates, as they rushed through the brush searching for a place to cross

for the stream was deep, and its bottom soft and treacherous. Three times they had fired and not a gun from our side had answered them.

"As I stared about me, dazed and helpless, suddenly close beside me rang out a sound that shocked and thrilled me, the sound of one—just one—Union musket. Then again I heard it; a courageous, daring sound it was, and, raising my head to see what it might mean, I looked upon the most splendid deed of courage my eyes have ever witnessed."

"What I saw was our soldier boy—the little fellow we had laughed at because he was so like a girl—with his pink cheeks and yellow curls, but eyes that blazed. There he stood alone, his back against a tree, and his fearless face toward the Confederates, steadily loading and firing, loading and firing his one solitary musket. As his single repeated shot told the Confederates, that just one Union soldier stood to defend the little valley, they raised a wild yell, and scores of muskets sent their bullets pelting about the little hero."

"Well, it takes a long time to tell it, though it all happened in five minutes. Our boys, crouching in their hiding places, were peering cautiously out to learn the meaning of the sound they heard. The sight of that boyish figure, facing death alone, in all that din and danger, was irresistible. The spirit of courage, that had been paralyzed by sudden terror, leaped to life in a hundred hearts, and every man of us was the soldier again."

"He had raised his gun to fire once more, and this time as its shot rang out a hundred echoing shots followed it, and from a hundred throats a ringing shout went up. Cheering and cheering again, our boys in blue burst from their hiding places and gathered about him where he stood; and the rout of five minutes ago, had become a rally. The safe crossing of the creek, which the Confederates had not discovered, our boys knew well."

"To the ford! to the ford!" they shouted; and then down to the water's edge they plunged, and into the water, knee deep, waist deep, deeper still; then across and up the bank, hand to hand, face to face, with the Confederates. It was desperate, the fighting that followed, but the spirit of our little hero had set the hearts of his comrades on fire, and they fought now with a courage like his; a courage that could meet death, but would never give up."

"And so, when it was over, and we crossed the creek to our camp again the valley was still ours. I tell you we hurraed over our victory, but the most of all we cheered for our soldier boy, who was as modest as he had been brave. Every man of us knew and owned that it was the steadfastness of this one lad, that had saved us that day from defeat and disgraceful loss."

Uncle Cloyde had finished, and Fred rolled thoughtfully on the grass for a few moments. Then he said:

"I never thought that just one soldier's courage could count for so much. I'll remember that story, uncle."

"Yes, one soldier's courage does count, my boy, for courage is catching. Courage is catching. Never forget this. You may never need to show the sort of courage that, in a time of unexpected attack, will keep you facing bullets alone, but there will come to you a time of sudden temptation, when the cause of right will need a moral courage, that will hold you steadfast to duty when others forsake it. When this comes, remember my story and my soldier boy, and stand alone, if need be, for what is right. And be sure that as our little hero's brave stand brought his comrades back to duty and victory, so yours will surely win for truth and right."—The Advance.

Ruth Bradford's Dress.

BY EUGENIA ELDRIDGE.

I like to look at the portrait paintings of my ancestors, that hang upon the walls of the dim parlor in the mansion house where I was born, but none interests me more than that of Ruth Bradford, stiff and stately in stiff brocade, pearl brooch, and fine laces.

But Ruth was a little girl once, with light step and buoyant heart, skipping gaily through meadows and pasture fields. Her home was in the Old Colony of Pilgrim fame, nearly a hundred miles from Boston Town. She was thorough Mayflower stock. Her line could be distinctly traced from William Bradford, governor of Plymouth, and the old names that signed the civil polity compact in the Mayflower's cabin, White, Alden, Hopkins, Carver, were all about her, neighbors since the settlement began.

In the far-away year 1756, Ruth was born, when the French and Indian war ravaged this section of country, and the little girl early learned to dread and fear the name Indian. Her father seldom left home without fortifying his house against an attack. But days of peace drew on. Their settlement was spared. The Indian tribes retreated to the depths of the forest, or grew friendly, and many and many were the fireside tales and folk-lore stories concerning them familiar to Ruth's

childhood, remembered by her to old age and told to children's children's children.

I seldom look at her portrait without thinking of the fund of stories and experiences she could relate, not only of the Indians, but the plain and frugal life of her early years, customs of the last century, and her clear and vivid recollections of the "Dark Day," in 1780, when meeting-houses were opened and the people wended their way thither, lanterns in hand to light the path, and her father who was deacon of the church, prayed that God, who spared the wicked people of Nineveh when they repented, would send them his light again. But I think we enjoyed, as much as anything she ever told us, the story of her first visit to Boston.

It was a great event in Ruth's life. Her father's eldest brother lived there, and she had the promise of accompanying her father on one of his visits. She was sixteen years old when she went, and it was almost as great an event to her brothers and sisters as to herself, for it was rarely that a boy or girl at the age of sixteen, from that remote township visited the great metropolis of the Bay Colony. But Ruth was going.

It was a fair October morning when she mounted the strong farm horse, behind her father, on a stout pillion. This pillion was a homemade affair, somewhat crude, but the cushion was soft, and there was a little platform upon which she could rest her feet. There were few carriages among country folk. The ox-cart served, but horseback riding was almost universal. So to Boston Ruth went, stopping for food and lodging at the various taverns along the turnpike.

Ruth's father was not sure how many nights they would need to be upon the journey. Of course it would depend upon the roads and the "holding-out" of the horse, for he was not so young as he was once. But in due time they halted in front of a queer little house on Milk street, and Ruth was in Boston, and she passed a whole week in the fair town.

She saw the magnificent new Town House, built in 1748, and for many years the "Old State House" of the present aristocratic city, and the Province House, where the state gentry met for balls and gay dress parties. To the eyes of this daughter of the Pilgrim, such scenes were new and strange indeed, but the crowning point of Ruth's visit was neither fin: buildings nor gentry, and yet it proved the girl-nature strong within her, and that a love of finery was slumbering in her heart. She was taken to the Tremont street shop and given a silk dress, plain silk, to be sure, but a real silk dress! Think of it! Was ever a girl so proud and happy before?

Her father looked grave at such "doings," but Ruth laughed softly as she folded the silk in a flat parcel and tied it to the pillion, thinking all the while how fine she would look (vain little Ruth), and they started for home. Never once did her father allude to the dress. Never once, it seemed to Ruth, did she cease to think of it.

Arrived home, to Ruth's dismay the new silk was placed by her mother in the cedar chest. That meant to stay, for Ruth well knew that what went into the cedar chest seldom came out except in time of housecleaning. Poor, poor Ruth! Life to her seemed bitter! Would that she had never gone to Boston!

To reconcile her, she was told the story of her father's great aunt, who lived in the latter part of the preceding century. When a young maiden, she had a silk dress, and wore it too, a piece of finery like a silk dress—defying the laws of the Colony and imperiling her immortal soul, for there were laws on dress and against wearing gold and silver and silks by men and women of mean education and low rank, and this maid was prosecuted, disgracing the whole family. Should not such an experience be a warning to Ruth?

"In vain did she plead; a hundred years had passed, but the Boston silk remained in the cedar chest."

But there came a day, years after, when the great chest was opened and the silk was brought forth, and no mention made of Old Colony laws; when Ruth stood arrayed in soft shining folds, with a string of gold beads around her neck, and a cap of soft, filmy lace upon her head. It was her wedding day.

After that there were many silks, including the stiff brocade in which her portrait was painted, and, for aught I know, gold and silver lace was upon her wearing apparel, for the prosperous years brought large wealth to her home, but whenever she told the story of her journey and first Boston silk, she would add, "Seek the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, my dears, and the outward adorning will care for itself." But this was when she became an old, old woman, for she lived to a great age.—Christian Work.

Phil's Experiment.

"Have I got to rake up these leaves every day?" asked Phil, with a whine in his voice.

"Yes, every day," replied his mother sternly.

"But what is the use? They keep on falling and make just as big a litter as before."

Nov... "You r... mother, s... "I wou... "And y... the dish... day. You... Phil co... leaves. "Seem... other fol... wood and... flowers—... "Do yo... you?" as... "Yes, s... doing thi... me." "Do yo... "Yes, m... mamma?" "If yo... "Rem... a single t... Phil dro... rushed a... up his m... pleasant... "Runni... his trou... "Mam... toward th... mamma... change h... "Ah! t... tell abou... often hav... It took... every sti... on his tr... skirt of t... and he r... was late... resolution... The te... tearing l... was glad... buttons... clothes v... "Never... me to do... please al... Return... boy's app... "Whe... for him... "Hav... mother... "Why... for me... done." "But... Phil st... look at t... I did... he turne... But th... looked a... "I ca... But hi... will not... "Phil... ling him... and rejo... came, he... He we... isfaction... drive th... "The... "Tat... and run... cow." He hu... everyth... had left... "Hel... pitcher... he ran f... "Now... none in... way?" "But a... trifle hu... together... had hea... any one... respons... peace a... will and... duties a... Next... bell to... mutton... "Wel... to live a... all," he... sneakin... to eat... appetizi... can't do... He y... fast, at... side-lon...