

Peace and War

"The Battle Horses"—A Story of Two Foals

By John Beckett

THE clock in the great gateway of the hall stables was chiming the hour of five and, as if in response to this signal, the sun burst over the eastern hills, and together they heralded a new day. It was a scene of "Country Life" in the part of agricultural England which is surrounded by great hills and moors, sloping down to fertile plains, through which the ice cold waters of the mountains flow, fertilize and urge the land to give its best. For miles could be seen an undulating landscape and the smoke from the thriving farmsteads arose like arrows of blue as they disappeared in the distance. Great stacks of hay and fields of ripening corn, cattle of all sizes and colors and herds of sheep gave evidence of peace, plenty and contentment.

The sparrows began the morning with a bright chirrup, the chaffinches followed with their silvery tone, the thrushes joined in with their carillon notes, and the powerful tweek, tweek of the black-bird gave evidence of his presence as it swiftly dived from bush to bush. The morning song of the lark could be heard as it climbed to the top of its ladder of pilgrimage, where, resting as if suspended from the blue dome above, it poured forth its daily anthem, marvelous in its tone, its solo and its purity. The noisy birds in the great rookery behind sent forth their mournful cry and flapped their riddled wings as they wheeled and circled in the air. In the stable matters began to move, head chains were rattled by the many highly bred and highly strung horses, occupying elaborate stalls replete with every comfort for their fiery but sensitive natures, impatient neighs gave warning it was time for the morning drink, and soon the great doors were opened by sleepy grooms and the fresh morning air filtered through the heavy stable-laden atmosphere. A peculiar sound from the end of the great building resulted in the sudden dropping of pails, brushes and oats and with a scurrying of feet, the stable hands hurried to the spot. Here was a large, roomy and splendidly furnished loose box, and on the soft bedding of sweet hay the daylight revealed a secret of the night. A favorite dappled gray hunter was glorying in the pride of maternity as it nestled its first-born son, like herself, a dappled gray, but the spots were not yet very clear.

Of aristocratic parents, although he was practically all legs, you could see by the delicate head and the sensitive little muzzle that he was born "in the purple." His future was the hunt, her lady's carriage or his master's charger. Some distance from the hall and surrounded by great chestnut trees and through a large orchard stand the buildings of the home farm.

On this same morning the dogs had already rounded up the cows, who were patiently waiting to enter the shippons for the morning's milk. Big-boned farm hands with great boots clattered over the cobbled yard and made first for the stables where the heavy farm horses were already stamping the great stones of their stalls, with iron shod and hairy feet. Although not like their haughty colleagues of the hall, still they looked for the morning's draught and also became impatient if it was delayed. This morning, however, there was something unusual in the air. The men hurried past all the horses in the stalls to a screened-off stall attached, but there were no silvered hay rack, nor padded sides, and no sweet hay.

The great oak posts and beams were moth eaten, the hay rack was rusty, the corn bin had been somewhat eaten away, and instead of sweet hay, ordinary straw and bracken took its place and yet that great honor of maternity was here again. The large bay mare of the farm was, like the dappled gray, also showing its pride in its first-born son. Unlike its dappled colleague, this little bay foal was not "born in the purple," and its breed told in the large head, broad shaped nostrils and clumsy legs. His future was the plough, the harrow, the reaper and probably an occasional journey to the nearest town in a spring cart.

Peace

In a small paddock where the grass was rich, the dappled gray foal passed its infancy and gambolled and rolled and nibbled the luscious green stems. It would now and again give a whinny and gallop the whole length of the green, his delicately-made feet hardly touching the ground as it passed beneath him. He would then stand with head in the air, his nostrils dilated, bringing out his magnificent form in all the beauty of its symmetry. The end of the paddock was railed off with wooden bars and beyond this was a large grazing field where the grass was poor and scattered. It was devoted to young calves and the farm stock generally and there passed the infancy of the little brown foal. Strange to say, it had developed into an animal that could be used for the road as well as the plow, and, although he was more a shire horse than anything, there was a touch of the hackney about him,

which smoothed its form somewhat and made it less ponderous than his colleagues. Often would it look up and watch its rival, which, however, only gave it a haughty stare and resumed its antics.

Once, however, the bay foal was nibbling close to the rail edge and, suddenly looking up, it saw the dainty little head of the gray hanging over the rail, and in its horsey way, taking stock as it were. It was a strange meeting and eye met eye. The gray was the first to move. With a snort bordering on contempt, it turned and raced down the green, its hoofs sending the turf in all directions.

The bay quietly resumed eating. Again the gray came up and this time gave a kind of whinny, which caused the bay to come a little nearer, and in the end there was a picture of an aristocratic gray head lowered in condescension to touch with its delicate and velvety muzzle the harder one of the bay.

War

In a foreign land, miles and miles away from this peaceful country scene, the stars were shining on fields of car-

nage, desolation and death. It was the eve before the resumption of the battle. Groups of soldiers were resting by the bivouac fires, the glow of which polished the tanned faces into the deep color of carmine; faces of men who do something before they die, men who can think of the beauty of death, meeting calmly the sweep of the sabre, or the death sting of the bullet. There was even a little peace here, but it was only a lull before the storm, when the shrieking havoc of death would return the attack. Now and again a restive charger would shake the jingling harness and the champing of bits would break the sleeping stillness. As the dawn came slowly, as if afraid to show its light on terrible deeds and hellish scenes that would follow, the silvery note of the trumpet rang out, startling and clear, but as the last note died away there came across the valley a deeper and louder tone; it was the boom, boom of the guns, the iron mouths had spoken and given the signal for the fight.

There was bustle, there was hurry—but there was order. The sharp commands of officers, clean cut men who

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