

MY FRIEND'S STORY.

(Continued)

It was very French, I know, but somehow it seemed all right, on that occasion, when the little Lieutenant put his arms around my neck and kissed me. I don't suppose we shall ever fully understand these French, anyway. They do everything under high pressure, and it occasionally they blow out a cylinder-head in politics or manners or religion, it must be expected.

Aimee did not kiss me.

"Do not wait to hear from us. Come often and call on Aimee. I shall probably be ordered soon to join my regiment. Remember, Mousicur, you are our friend, and whatever happens, bring my angel-daughter under the Stars and Stripes, and care for her as I would did God let me live." Aimee sat in tears. The Lieutenant stood in the middle of the room with one hand on his heart and the other extended in benediction over his child. Thus I left them.

CHAPTER V.

Paris in sackcloth and ashes. Paris hungry and thirsty, and gazing out of darkened windows on desolate streets, where the few shivering citizens who stir abroad are seeking bits of wood, or scattered boughs from lately cut shade-trees along the beautiful streets. It is winter in Paris, and yet at night casements do not rattle with music, nor the pavements jar with rapidly fleeting carriages. It is a strange winter for the gay city. At night we cannot look down the long avenues and see them flooded with light. No; all the light we see is the fires at the sentry reserves in open parks or at windy street corners, or along the boulevards, where an army is encamped. Paris is surrounded with fortifications. Is it a providential meeting out to the noisy, belligerent city of the measure she would heap for others, that all the blood and hunger and cold of war should at last settle down at her gates—that the dregs of the cup at which the Emperor drank and Bazaine tasted, should be poured down the throat of Paris? Hollow-eyed wretches might pour out of the faubourgs and shiver and curse, but what can they smite? Where shall the weight of their anger fall? On the Germans? Ah! these cold, sleepy Germans. From Saarbruck to Sedan has been the stolid, heavy pounding of an overgrown blacksmith. No valor, no *elan*, no dash is of any avail. The German is fate itself.

The Emperor, with one hundred thousand men—with a thousand batteries of his vaunted light artillery—with an eagle and two standards, had surrendered at Sedan. Bazaine had followed the Imperial example at Metz, and had laid in the broad palm of William of Prussia a complete army, with all its equipments and stores, and still France lived! But she is starving, and it is winter.

Paris is France—then save Paris.

The Crown Prince of Prussia had drawn those cold, calm German lines around the gay city, and waits with phlegmatic patience for Paris to yield. Of course, she will struggle in her death agony, and then she will feel the shells from two hundred cannon; or if her struggles push her out far enough, she will feel the iron hail of grape and canister, and be driven back, torn and bleeding, to await a slower death by starvation. This is such a strange aspect in which to view the luxurious capital! The restaurant where idle and fashionable youth used to order the dinner of a dozen courses is still open. How dreary the yellow bill of fare looks which is pinned behind the cashier's desk as a curiosity! The wine card is there too, and it looks also like a flower long dead and only dear by its memories. Perhaps a faint tinge of the odor is still there. Now the restaurant offers to its favored patrons steaks and roasts at fabulous prices; but these savory cuts of choice meat should savor of the war also, for they are cut from the bodies of horses which once carried the saddle in the cavalry or worked in the collars of the artillery. And even this food is difficult of attainment except by the wealthy. What of the pallid wretches of the faubourgs? Why they tell us that they are fishing with line and hook through the gratings of the sewers, and their hooks are baited with crumbs of bread, and when they are successful and secure a bite, they drag out the great blue rat of the Seine, and shout with glee, for they have won sustenance for a family for one day more.

But the Germans have shut Paris in from sympathy or help. The line is now complete, and it is only a question of endurance, and then Paris will fall and the ruin of France will be complete. The city is very silent. The French soldiers do not sing as they did two months ago. They have a drabbed, discouraged look, as of a handsome militia company caught in a thunder-shower. The drums do not throb as they did, nor the fife scream. Paris is not enthusiastic—she is only enduring.

But in this crucible of national torment the American Minister remains with the Provisional Government, as he did with the Empire, and as he will with the Republic, when it is set up, as no doubt it will be. Before the eyes of Paris float the Stars and Stripes, and even the nearest lines of Germans may look upon "Old Glory" as it lazily drifts about in the wintry wind. We had supposed that every American citizen had passed out before the city was fully invested, and that we should have a long season of rest until Paris became again the centre of fashion and folly. Imagine, then, my surprise as I saw entering the office one day a full-blooded, athletic, but lank New England Yankee. My heart leaped with pleasure as he took off his tall silk hat, somewhat weather-beaten, and reaching down into its capacious depths fished out a red printed bill and pointed to the last line with one finger, as he laid it on my desk. I read:

"Nehemiah Sturgis, General Agent."

"I hev to git them bills done into French over here. That ain't a bad

bill, though. Gosh! I could git little dodgers like them printed in Boston fur a dollar and seventy-five cents a thousand. Costs me about twice that here in Patee."

"You appear to have something to do with soap," I remarked with a smile.

"Well, I guess, Senator, non-corrosive, non-explosive; floats in water, as it oughter; one pound of it will make sixty-four cubic feet of lather, and it will remove any kind of grease, stain, iron-rust, mildew or moths. It will prove stronger, last longer, and will stay sweet and remain hard in any climate. We give a beautiful chromo card with every cake. Save up your wrappers and send twenty-five of them to the home office, and get a large steel engraving, eighteen by twenty-six, of the capture of Fort Fisher by Leonidas Brown—that is, the picture is by Leonidas Brown; He didn't capture Fort Fisher. Here, put a cake in your pocket."

"Well, but, my alive," said I, "why didn't you get out before the siege? You will starve here or be killed."

"Biggest thing you ever see, Senator. It will be in history. 'The agent of the Wild Flower Soap remained in Paris during the siege.' Gosh! look here; I gave away a thousand cakes to the soldiers, and whenever one was shot or captured the Germans found the cake of soap in his pocket, with the chromo card and the name of the general agent in Paris, and the firm's name in Boston. Look at them 'ere cards!"

And he spread on my desk a row of gaudy advertising cards, with red-checked damsels in every position at the bath or wash-tub, and a conspicuous advertisement at the bottom.

"I want to git," said he, "some photographs of great paintings in the Louvre, and when I go home I will elevate the soap trade and encourage art all at the same time. This will be the biggest kind of a boom in ten years in America. Save up the wrappers and send 'em in to the home office."

"In the meantime, you will starve in Paris," said I, laughing.

"Yes, in the meanest kind of a time; but the company foots the bill, and I have eat horse-meat till I felt as if I was in light harness all the time, and fittin' up for a spring meetin' on Long Island. On, I'll come out all right if the artillery doesn't give out. Say, I used to hear the infantry volunteers tell about fightin' cavalry, and how many saddles they emptied in a fight. I don't know how many saddles it will empty from the under side to feed me until the 'springtime comes again, my love,' as the poet says, but I am goin' to see the thing through. Put me on the register, and if I fall, ship the remains; but while there's life there's soap!"

Boom! Ah, that is close by!

We hurried out into the street, and were nearly crushed by a battery of artillery, which was hurrying out to the barriers. In the shame and humiliation of France, amid the ruins of her military glory, in her darkest hour, there arose a flame of such lustre that for a moment it caused her to forget the machinations of Royalists, the ambitions of the Republicans, and the brutishness of the Socialists or Reds. With Bazaine, McMahon, and the Emperor defeated, there remained in Paris—Trochu.

France was to cast off for a moment her sackcloth and ashes, and see for a time such fighting as she saw at Jena, Austerlitz, Magenta, Solferino. When the lioness is in the den with her cubs, beware!

Trochu was shut up in Paris with the fragments of the army, and the setting sun of France's glory would go down in a sea of flame.

When we reached the barriers we looked out on a glorious scene. Forty thousand infantry were in column of battalions. On the flanks the pitiful remnants of the cavalry. In the fortifications on the right and on the left the artillerists stood at their guns. Once more a dull boom of a single gun, and then the roar of two hundred pieces discharged at once to cover a sortie.

These Frenchmen were hungry—they were desperate; and now we shall see how the soldier fights when he is in earnest.

Forward! The stolid mass of infantry moves out against the Prussian line. They have siege guns, these Germans, and the sixty-four-pound shell ploughs the solid mass of unformed humanity. The gap silently closes, and the mass moves on. Ha! now a hundred field pieces open at close range, with shrapnel case. There is now behind the moving mass a terrible debris of writhing wounded soldiers and quiet dead. Now they double-quick and come up close to the red clay earthworks of the enemy, and the steady long roll of thirty thousand muskets open on what is left of the sortie. Here behind moves Trochu. His aids dash into the smoke a moment, and return with smiles on their faces. They salute, and say:

"They are climbing over into the works!" Trochu motions back to the rear, and the cannons cease their bellowing. The French are in the German works.

Ha! the siege guns—are silent. Do we hear a shout?

Yee, a shout of victory, for the French hold the line of works. There is a spot yonder where the smoke rises in a white cloud, and under it is an incessant roar, as of the attrition of a thousand grinding masses of granite. It moves away. The German line is broken. These are the same blood with those French who moved up the fire-strewn path of Sebastopol, who cheered the Eagles at Austerlitz. But what avails it now. Dead-weight of numbers push them panting back. Over the works again, with three Germans to each desperate Frenchman! Down the escarpment, parading it with their blood, into the ditch, where they lie gasping for a moment and then clamber out and come creeping back—yes, but they come back with honor! With another Trochu France might be free, but history will linger long over the terrible sorties at the siege of Paris. Up the street past us limp men who use a musket for a crutch. Men with blood-stained handkerchiefs bound about their heads sadly smile as they hear our words of praise, but they are too weary to answer, only they raise the right hand to the bloody forehead in military salute. Now come the stretchers with growing but-