



THE OLD SCHOOL-HOUSE.

"Within, the master's desk is seen,
Deep scarred by rans official;
The warning floor, the battered seats,
The jack-knife's carved initial.

The charcoal frescos on its wall;
Its door's worn sill, betraying
The fact that, creeping slow to school,
Went storming out to playing!"

WHITTIER.

THE STORY OF A SHORT LIFE.

BY JULIANA HORATIA EWING.

CHAPTER III.

"Ut migraturus habita" ("Dwell as if about to depart")—Old House motto.



HE barrack-master's wife was standing in the porch of her hut, the sides of which were of the simplest trellis-work of crossed fir-poles, through which she could watch the proceedings of the gardener without baking herself in the sun. Suddenly she snatched up a green-lined white umbrella, that had seen

service in India, and ran out. "O'Reilly! what is that baby doing? There! that white-headed child crossing the parade with a basket in its little arms! It's got nothing on its head. Please go and take it to its mother before it gets sunstroke."

The gardener was an Irish soldier—an old soldier, as the handkerchief depending from his cap, to protect the nape of his neck from the sun, bore witness. He was a tall man, and stepped without ceremony over the garden paling to get a nearer view of the parade. But he stepped back again at once, and resumed his place in the garden.

"He's Corporal Macdonald's child, madam. The Blind Baby, they call him. Not a bit of harm will he get. They're as hard as nails the whole lot of them. If I was to take him in now, he'd be out before my back was turned. His brothers are at school, and Blind Baby's just as happy as the day is long, playing at funerals all the time."

"Blind! Is he blind? Poor little soul! But he's got a great round potato-basket in his arms. Surely they don't make that afflicted infant fetch and carry."

O'Reilly laughed so heartily, that he scandalized his own sense of propriety.

"I ask your pardon, madam. But there is no fear that Blind Baby'll fetch and carry. Every man in the lines is his nurse."

"But what's he doing with that round hamper as big as himself?"

"It's just a make-believe for the big drum, madam. The 'Dead March' is his whole delight. 'Twas only yesterday I said to his father, 'Corporal,' I says, 'we'll live to see Blind Baby a band-master yet,' I says; it's a pure pleasure to see him beat out a tune with his closed fist."

"Will I go and borrow a barrow now, madam? added O'Reilly, returning to his duties. He was always willing and never idle, but he liked change of occupation.

"No, no. Don't go away. We shan't want a wheelbarrow till we've finished trenching this border and picking out the stones. Then you can take them away and fetch the new soil."

"You're at a deal of pains, madam, and it's a poor patch when it's all done to it."

"I can't live without flowers, O'Reilly, and the colonel says I may do what I like with this bare strip."

"Ah, don't touch the dirty stones with

your fingers, ma'am! I'll have the lot picked in no time at all."

"You see, O'Reilly, you can't grow flowers in sand unless you can command water, and the colonel tell me that when it's hot here the water-supply runs short, and we mayn't water the garden from the pumps."

O'Reilly smiled superior. That's as true a word as ever ye spoke, madam, and if it were not that 'twould be taking a liberty, I'd give ye some advice about gardening in camp. It's not the first time I'm quartered in Asholt, and I know the ways of it."

"I shall be very glad of advice. You know I have never been stationed here before."

"'Tis an old soldier's advice, madam."

"So much the better," said the lady, warmly.

O'Reilly was kneeling to his work. He now sat back on his heels, and not without a certain dignity that bade defiance to his surroundings he commenced his oration.

"Please God to spare you and the colonel, madam, to put in his time as barrack-master at this station, ye'll see many a regiment come and go, and be making themselves at home all along. And any one that knows this place, and the nature of the soil, tear-rs would overflow his eyes to see the regiments come for drill, and be take themselves to gardening. Maybe the boys have marched in footsore and fasting, in the hottest of weather, to cold comfort in empty quarters, and they'll not let many hours fit over their heads before some of 'em'll get possession of a load of green turf, and be laying it down for borders around their huts. It's the young ones I'm speaking of; and there ye'll see them, in the blazing sun, with their shirts open, and not a thing on their heads, squaring and fitting the turfs for bare life, watering them out of old pic-dishes and stable-buckets and what not, singing and whistling, and fetching and carrying between the pump and their quarters, just as cheerful as so many birds building their nests in the spring."

"A very pretty picture, O'Reilly. Why should it bring tears to your eyes? An old soldier like you must know that one would never have a home in quarters at all if one did not begin to make it at once."

"True for you, madam. Not a doubt of it. But it goes to your heart to see labor thrown away; and it's not once in a hundred times that grass planted like that will get hold of a soil like this, and the boys themselves at drill all along, or gone out under canvas in Bottomless Bog before the week's over, as likely as not."

"That would be unlucky. But one must take one's luck as it comes. And you've not told me, now, what you do advise for camp gardens."

"That's just what I'm coming to, ma'am. See the old soldier! What does he do? Turns the bucket upside down outside his hut, and sits on it, with a cap on his head, and a handkerchief down his back, and some tin tacks, and a ball of string,—trust a soldier's eye to get the lines straight,—every one of them beginning on the ground and nearly going up to the roof."

"For creepers, I suppose? What does the old soldier plant?"

"Beans, madam,—scarlet runners. These are the things for Asholt. A few beans

are nothing in your baggage. They like a warm place, and when they're on the sunny side of a hut they've got it and no mistake. They're growing while you're on duty. The flowers are the right soldier's color; and when it comes to the beans, ye may put your hand out of the window and gather them, and no trouble at all."

"The old soldier is very wise; but I think I must have more flowers than that. So I plant and if they die I am very sorry; and if they live, and other people have them, I try to be glad. One ought to learn to be unselfish, O'Reilly, and think of one's successors."

"And that's true, madam; barring that I never knew any one's successor to have the same fancies as himself: one plants tress to give shelter, and the next cuts them down to let in the air."

"Well, I suppose the only way is to be prepared for the worst. The rose we planted yesterday by the porch is a great favorite of mine; but the colonel calls it 'Marching orders.' It used to grow over my window in my old home, and I have planted it by every home I have had since; but the colonel says whenever it settled and began to flower the regiment got the route."

"The colonel must name it again, madam," said O'Reilly, gallantly, as he hitched up the knees of his trousers, and returned to the border. "It shall be 'Standing Orders' now, if soap and water can make it blossom, and I'm spared to attend to it all the time. Many a hundred roses may you and the colonel pluck from it, and never one with a thorn!"

"Thank you, O'Reilly; thank you very much. Soapy water is very good for roses, I believe!"

"It is so, madam. I put in a good deal of my time as officer's servant after I was in the Connaught Rangers, and the captain I was with one time was as fond of flowers as yourself. There was a mighty fine rose-bush by his quarters, and every morning I had to carry out his bath to it. He used more soap than most gentlemen, and when he sent me to the town for it—'It's not for myself, O'Reilly,' he'd say, 'so much as for the rose. Bring large tablets,' he'd say, 'and the best scented ye can get. The roses'll be the sweeter for it.' That was his way of joking, and never a smile on his face. He was odd in many of his ways, was the captain, but he was a grand soldier entirely; a good officer, and a good friend to his men, and to the wives and children no less. The regiment was in India when he died of cholera, in twenty-four hours, do what I would. 'Oh, the cramp in my legs, O'Reilly!' he says. 'God bless ye, captain,' says I, 'never mind your legs; I'd manage the cramp, sir,' I says, 'if I could but keep up your heart.'—'Ye'll not do that, O'Reilly,' he says, 'for all your goodness; I lost it too long ago.' That was his way of joking, and never a smile on his face. 'Twas a pestilential hole we were in, and that's the truth; and cost Her Majesty more in lives than would have built healthy quarters, and given us every comfort; but the flowers throve there if we didn't, and the captain's grave was filled till ye couldn't get the sight of him for roses. He was a good officer, and beloved of his men; and better master never a man had!"

As he ceased speaking, O'Reilly drew his sleeve sharply across his eyes, and then bent again to his work, which was why he failed to see what the barrack-master's wife saw, and did not for some moments discover that she was no longer in the garden. The matter was this:

The barrack-master's quarters were close to the iron church, and the straight road that ran past both was crossed, just beyond the church, by another straight road, which finally led out to and joined a country highway. From this highway an open carriage and pair were being driven into the camp as a soldier's funeral was marching to church. The band frightened the horses, who were got past with some difficulty, and having turned the sharp corner, were coming rapidly towards the barrack-master's hut, when Blind Baby, excited by the band, strayed from his parade-ground, tumbled basket and all, into the ditch that divided it from the road, picked up himself and his basket, and was sturdily setting forth across the road just as the frightened horses came plunging to the spot.

The barrack-master's wife was not very young and not very slender. Rapid move-

ments were not easy to her. She was nervous, also, and could never afterwards remember what she did with herself in those brief moments before she became conscious that the footman had got to the horses' heads, and that she herself was almost under their feet, with Blind Baby in her arms. Blind Baby himself recalled her to consciousness by the ungrateful fashion in which he pummelled his deliverer with his fists and howled for his basket, which had rolled under the carriage to add to the confusion. Nor was he to be pacified till O'Reilly took him from her arms.

By this time men had rushed from every hut and kitchen, wash-place and shop, and were swarming to the rescue; and through the whole disturbance, like minute-guns, came the short barks of a puppy, which Leonard had insisted upon taking with him to show to his aunt despite the protestations of his mother; for it was Lady Jane's carriage, and this was how the sisters met.

They had been sitting together for some time, so absorbed by the strangeness and the pleasure of their new relations, that Leonard and his puppy had slipped away unobserved, when Lady Jane, who was near the window, called to her sister-in-law: "Adelaide, tell me, my dear, is this Colonel Jones?" She spoke with some trepidation. It is so easy for those unacquainted with uniforms to make strange blunders. Moreover, the barrack-master, though soldierly looking, was so, despite a very unsoldierly defect. He was exceedingly stout, and as he approached the miniature garden gate, Lady Jane found herself gazing with some anxiety to see if he could possibly get through.

But O'Reilly did not make an empty boast when he said that a soldier's eye was true. The colonel came quite neatly through the toy entrance, knocked nothing down in the porch, bent and bared his head with one gesture as he passed under the drawing-room doorway, and bowing again to Lady Jane, moved straight to the side of his wife.

Something in the action—a mixture of dignity and devotion, with just a touch of defiance—went to Lady Jane's heart. She went up to him and held out both her hands: "Please shake hands with me, Colonel Jones. I am so very happy to have found a sister!" In a moment more she turned round, saying, "I must show you your nephew. Leonard!" But Leonard was not there.

"I fancy I have seen him already," said the colonel. "If he is a very beautiful boy, very beautifully dressed in velvet, he's with O'Reilly, watching the funeral."

Lady Jane looked horrified, and Mrs. Jones looked relieved.

"He's quite safe if he's with O'Reilly. But give me my sunshade, Henry, please; I dare say Lady Jane would like to see a funeral too."

It is an Asholt amenity to take care that you miss no opportunity of seeing a funeral. It would not have occurred to Lady Jane to wish to go, but as her only child had gone she went willingly to look for him. As they turned the corner of the hut they came straight upon it, and at that moment the "Dead March" broke forth afresh.

The drum beat out those familiar notes which strike upon the heart rather than the ear, the brass screamed, the ground trembled to the tramp of feet and the lumbering of the gun-carriage, and Lady Jane's eyes filled suddenly with tears at the sight of the dead man's accoutrements lying on the Union Jack that serves a soldier for a pall. As she dried them she saw Leonard.

Drawn up in accurate line with the edge of the road, O'Reilly was standing to salute and as near to the Irish private as he could squeeze himself stood the boy, his whole body stretched to the closest possible imitation of his new and deeply revered friend, his left arm glued to his side, and the back of his little right hand laid against his brow, gazing at the pathetic pugeant as it passed him with devouring eyes. And behind them stood Blind Baby, beating upon his basket.

For the basket had been recovered, and Blind Baby's equanimity also; and he wandered up and down the parade again in the sun, long after the soldier's funeral had wailed its way to the graveyard, over the heather-covered hill.

(To be Continued.)