

THE LIEUTENANT.

"Yes," said the Captain reflectively, "I took a lot of saving. It's given me faith for these fellows."

He waved his hand toward the row of sleeping men; and the Lieutenant followed his glance. They were standing in the "dossing room" of one of the Salvation Army shelters where supper, bed, and breakfast could be obtained at the reasonable charge of 4d., and it was not so much the faces before him, haggard and unkempt often, but clean, and softened by sleep, that impressed on the Captain the need of salvation for "these fellows," as his recollection of them two hours before, hungry, clamorous, and unwashed. Slumbering in the long, narrow, cushioned boxes, with the uniform brown hides thrown over them, they looked picturesque, and even oddly peaceful, now.

"I daresay there's not one of them," said the Captain, always in an undertone, "that the Lord would have as much difficulty with as he had with me. Why, when I was a tiny lad, and my brother and I had apples given us, I used always to take the little apple purely for the sake of making them think I was unselfish. They pointed me out as an example, and there I was swelling with pride. Always pondering on how to cut a good moral figure, I was. Just give me a character for self-sacrifice, and wild horses wouldn't drag it from me. That's the worst kind of a fellow to save, and he was twelve years about it; and sometimes I doubt if it's finished yet. I've hung on to acts of self-denial till I've compelled others to act selfishly. 'Tis a terrible temptation that. Why it's better to do wrong and have done with it than be always hankering after your own salvation. Brother Judd was in the right—you remember Brother Judd—when he said in camp meeting: 'I've lost my soul, I'll go and save some other fellow's.' And maybe some of these chaps are capable of a fine act without so much as thinking about it, that I would go and do with any of them; but then all the while there and back I'd have a voice one side of me saying: 'Now Brooke, give God all the glory; and another voice the other: 'Yes, yes, Brooke, but save yourself a little bit out.' The complexity of my motives is a great stumbling block to me at times. I've had to give up and say: 'Lord, here's the act, and why I've done it I don't know; but Thou knowest, and whatever becomes of my motives I'd like Thee to use it for Thy service.' That's the only source of peace, brother."

"Aye," said the Lieutenant, nodding soberly. He was a man of fewer and slower words than the Captain, but with a peculiarly gentle and kindly face.

"I don't believe you were ever tempted in that way, brother," said the Captain, looking at him admiringly. "You live—"

"Too near the Lord," he was going to say; but something in the other's unconscious face arrested him.

"Why, yes," said the Lieutenant slowly. "I've been tempted to take the glory—frequently. But I'd sooner the Lord had it, after all; for the world knoweth Him not."

"There's some of these," he continued after a pause, "as I believe literally knows their bibles by art; and yet they'll come in reeling drunk, and have to be put out again. The inward witness, that's what's lacking. You saw the man who came in last?"

The Captain nodded.

"He's a barrister," said the Lieutenant, very low. "Said he was making his fortune at the bar, when the temptation to drink overcame him. Said it was too late to begin afresh. I said it was never too late to begin afresh in the strength of God; but I think I've been a bit of the pride of intellect."

"Always a plan of salvation, that's too simple," said the Captain. "So 'twas for me," said the Captain crisply. "It took me twelve years. I sympathize with that fellow."

A sudden laugh in the room, that was stifled quickly, startled them both. Could it have come from the barrister? They glanced at him sharply; but to all appearance the barrister, with his unkempt hair falling about his forehead, was as fast asleep as the rest. Nevertheless, they had their suspicions.

"It's time to run in," said the Captain gravely. "Good night, Lieutenant."

The next morning, while the barrister was eating his bread and drinking his coffee with a leisurely air, the Lieutenant observed him, and came to the conclusion that most likely they were right in their conjecture. The

barrister would have been handsome, with his curly fair hair and good-natured gray eyes, if he had not looked so dissipated. Certainly he had the manners of a gentleman, and, ragged and unkempt, he left the shelter that morning with a nod and careless greeting to the Lieutenant that seemed appropriate to some fashionable hotel. The Lieutenant looked after him, laying mental snares for the saving of his soul.

"Looks a regular West End swell, don't he?" he said, turning to the Captain with his gentle laugh. The Captain was not in charge of the shelter, but his room was close by, and as of late his brother officers had been somewhat anxious about the Lieutenant's physical, as distinct from his spiritual, welfare, the Captain found time to run in and look after him morning, noon, and night, in the midst of his own crowded days.

"There's many," said the Captain, "in silks and satins who are in far worse case. This poor chap's sin has taken the only form they understand—that of losing his money; and they all turn their backs upon him. That's the way of the world, but not the way of the army, praise the Lord! Have you spoken to him about his soul again, brother?"

"Well, no," said the Lieutenant apologetically. "It struck me he was one of those we must catch with guile. Maybe you'll have a word with him to-night if he comes again."

"I will," said the Captain. But it was many nights before Aylmer—it was the barrister's true name—came again; and when he came he was distinctly more ragged and disreputable. But he came early, and Captain and Lieutenant had the opportunity they wished for.

"Brother," said the Captain mildly but firmly, "you don't look as if your present plan of life suited you. Hadn't you better try the Lord's plan?"

"Really," said Aylmer courteously, sitting down on one of the boxes not yet turned into a bed, "I haven't the remotest idea."

"Will you hear it?" said the Captain, taking out his little Bible.

"If you'll excuse me," said Aylmer hastily, "I would much rather not."

"Brother," said the Captain, "you've sought happiness in worldly pleasures and not found it, and you think the search is hopeless. I'm not going to preach to you against your will, but you may find true happiness yet; for I've found it, and it took me twelve years."

"Thanks," said Aylmer. "But I daresay it isn't of much consequence," he added lightly, "whether I find it or not."

"There's a great hereafter, brother," returned the captain decidedly and promptly; and the Lieutenant's slow, gentle voice echoed:

"Brother, there's a great hereafter."

Aylmer looked at them both, and suddenly broke into a laugh.

"I hope there is," he said, "the present doesn't amount to much."

"Are you prepared to meet it, brother?" persisted the captain.

"Yes," returned Aylmer with a sudden sharpness. "I'm prepared to meet anything—but life. Now are you satisfied?"

"No," said the captain. "Far from it. But I've said my say, brother, and I'll leave you in peace, if peace you call it."

He turned to a new-comer, but the Lieutenant lingered.

"Maybe," he said deprecatingly, "you'd like a smoke. We've smoking in a downstairs room I'll show you. And I'm no smoker myself, but I've got a bit of bacca handy, if you'll make free with it."

"You keep tobacco for the benefit of the dossers," said Aylmer curiously. "That is very good-natured of you."

The Lieutenant looked half embarrassed, and Aylmer felt that he had used a wrong adjective.

"It isn't in the fourpence?" he said, smiling.

"Why, no," said the Lieutenant, with an answering smile. "May be not."

"Then I'll have a smoke gladly," said Aylmer, "and many thanks. You look as if you knew what it is to be hard up."

"Bless you!" said the Lieutenant. "I've been hard up all my life. Come a more natural to me than it does to you" Sir.

"You don't deserve it, however," said Aylmer involuntarily, "as do."

"I think, maybe," replied the Lieutenant mildly, "there's not much difference between men's deservings if it isn't for the grace of God. But that's the forbidden sub-

ject, isn't it? And now if you'll allow me I'll show you the smoking room."

What was it in Aylmer that won on the Lieutenant, till he said, in a puzzled way, and disregarding all circumstantial evidence, that Aylmer was not far from the kingdom? He did not know, any more than Aylmer knew why the Lieutenant won on him; yet in their sentences the same thought passed through the mind of each:

"He's such a gentleman."

"Does it matter," said Aylmer the next morning, "if I come again to-night?"

"You'll be very welcome," said the Lieutenant with quiet sincerity. "Good morning, brother. God bless you!"

With which unusual benediction ringing in his ears, Aylmer went into the city, a very briefless barrister. But at night, having somehow amassed fourpence, and no more, he returned, and was received by the Lieutenant with a cordial grasp of the hand and look of welcome, and wondered how long it was since any one had shaken hands with him like that. For several nights more he came always reading his own especial greeting in the Lieutenant's face. Then again there was a break; and the Lieutenant looked for him vainly, and somehow missed him. He was different from the rest.

At last, one night, later than usual, the well-known figure entered. Aylmer had ascended the stairs quietly and steadily; nevertheless the Lieutenant, who was accustomed to this manoeuvre on the part of drunken men, gave him a doubtful glance before his cordial "Good night, brother."

"I'm not your brother!" said Aylmer, thickly, and with a savage oath.

A tumult arose among the dossers, who many of them had known the Lieutenant long, and, in their wild way, loved him.

"He's half-seas over. Turn him out, Lieutenant; we'll give you a hand!"

Half a dozen strong fellows rose at once, but the Lieutenant waved them back.

"You're not yourself to-night," he said to Aylmer soothingly. "Sit down a bit."

What Aylmer's disordered brain made of the kindly invitation there is no knowing; but what he did was this: Without a second's warning he knocked the Lieutenant down. Then, partially sobered already, he turned on his heel.

He had the advantage of the other dossers in being close to the door, and he passed through swiftly. But a savage howl rose, and a dozen of them were after him. There was only one voice that could possibly stop them, and that voice they heard. The Lieutenant was staggering to his feet and stood between them and the door.

"Wait a bit, boys," he said, in his gentle, deprecating voice. "You've some of you been the worse for drink, as he was. 'Tis my quarrel."

"Take my place, brother," he added anxiously to the sub-officer who entered just then, bewildered at Aylmer's sudden exit, and he was gone. Quite oblivious of the fact that his face was cut and bleeding, he ran down the dusky stairs and into the street. There, just turning a corner, was Aylmer's retreating figure. What direction was he going in, with such quick and steady steps? The Lieutenant breathed a prayer and hurried after him.

Partially sobered by seeing the Lieutenant, one of the best fellows he had ever known, lying at his feet, the cool night air did the rest for Aylmer, who, in one of the moments of vivid awakening men have, suddenly knew, or thought he knew, what he really wanted. A sense of freedom, almost joy, woke in him at the thought that he could fling away a life so utterly worthless, as he would have flung away some baneful thing. It seemed no wrong he was about to do: the thought that it was cowardly to die was obliterated for him by the thought that it was cowardly to live like this. Words were surging in his mind over and over:

"And in the great flood wash away my sin."

He was aware that he meant to do something that would change all, and only feared the failure of his courage.

"Oh, God! let me go through with it," he prayed. And so he came to the bridge, moderating his pace for fear of attracting suspicion; and entering one of the loneliest recesses, paused an instant, looking over, and heard the water plashing underneath. But he dared not stay to listen. He

upon the stone bench, was springing was over—no, some one came. Two arms had grasped him was standing on the ground:

his deliverer, and hearing the tide, to which all this mattered nothing, plashing quietly on.

A spectral looking figure it was that stood before him, with streaks of blood on its face, which otherwise was a queer ashy-white to the very lips. Then Aylmer realized that it was the Lieutenant come to look after him. And he also realized, as perhaps no one hitherto had done sufficiently, that it was time for some one to look after the Lieutenant. He sprang up.

One apprehensive hand the Lieutenant held out, but Aylmer stopped him.

"I'm not going to do it again," he said decidedly. "You'll take my arm. I'll get you—oh, hang it, you won't take brandy."

"I've been like it before," gasped the Lieutenant feebly; but Aylmer led him, by very slow steps, into the nearest shop, whose owner, fortunately, was a good, buxom woman, who, like every one else, knew the Lieutenant.

"Bless us," she said, "he do look ill!"

"Tell me where the nearest doctor is," said Aylmer impatiently.

"Just a street off—why, Polly, Polly! show him, child—Dr. Morris; never mind your hat."

They were back in ten minutes—Polly, Aylmer, and the doctor, a man with a shrewd, pleasant face, who stepped up quietly to the Lieutenant's sofa as if, without seeing him, he knew all about it. The Lieutenant looked up and, seeing Aylmer, smiled faintly.

"Well, my man," said the doctor, scribbling something on a piece of paper as he spoke. "You army fellows overdo it, you know. Here, my girl—"

He handed the paper to Polly.

"Take it to the nearest chemist," he said, "and come straight back with what he gives you."

"You overdo it," he repeated, turning to the Lieutenant again. "How do you feel now?"

"I'm at peace," said the Lieutenant. "Bless His name!"

"At peace? Oh!" said the doctor. "Well, I daresay you are—but physically, you know—that's my matter. You haven't felt quite strong, have you, for some time?"

"I've thought," said the Lieutenant, with the queer gasp that Aylmer had noted before.

"Don't go on when you feel like that," said the doctor hastily. "Take your time, man; I've plenty. We'll wait a bit."

The Lieutenant smiled gratefully and paused. When he next spoke his voice was very faint, not did he trouble to reiterate his former words, but went on:

"As there might be something wrong about my art."

"Ah," said the doctor quietly. "How long have you felt like that? No hurry, man, no hurry, here's the medicine."

He undid a small tin that Polly had brought, with deft hands, and gave a spoonful of the contents to the Lieutenant.

"Nothing intoxicating," he said cheerily; "I saw your Blue Ribbon. How long did you say?"

"I can't tell exactly," replied the Lieutenant. "May be three years may be four."

"Ah!" said the doctor. "Let's feel your pulse."

He sat down by the couch and took the patient's hand in his. The Lieutenant's pulse was throbbing very quickly, very faintly, and had a way of missing beats without giving notice, and flickering, like a lamp that is going out.

"I think," said the doctor presently, "I'd stay here to-night."

"That he shall," said the buxom shopkeeper. "He's welcome to stay to-night."

"They'll be wondering at seeing him here," said the Lieutenant. "Are, for ten."

"Your friends here?" said the doctor.

"No," replied the doctor. "He's better not."

"You'll stay?" said the doctor.

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