



LINNETS AT HOME.

THE STORY OF A SHORT LIFE.

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CHAPTER II.

"—an acre of barren ground; ling, heath, broom furze, anything." *Tempest, Act I., Scene I.*

"Sound, sound the clarion, fill the life!
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name." *Scott.*

Take a highwayman's heath.

Destroy every vista of life with fire and axe, from the pine that has longest been a landmark, to the smallest beetle smothered in smoking moss.

Burn acres of purple and pink heather, and pare away the young bracken that springs verdant from its ashes.

Let flame consume the perfumed gorse in all its glory, and not spare the broom, whose more exquisite yellow atones for its lack of fragrance.

In this common ruin be every lesser flower involved: blue beds of speedwell by the wayfarer's path—the daintier milkwort, and rougher red rattle—down to the very dodder that clasps the heather, let them perish, and the face of Dame Nature be utterly blackened! Then:

Shave the heath as bare as the back of your hand, and if you have felled every tree, and left not so much as a tussock of grass or a scarlet toadstool to break the force of the winds, then shall the winds come, from the east and from the west, from the north and the south, and shall raise on your shaven heath clouds of sand that would not discredit a desert in the heart of Africa.

By some such recipe the ground was prepared for that camp of instruction at Asholt which was, as we have seen, a thorn in the side of at least one of its neighbors. Then a due portion of this sandy oasis in a wilderness of beauty was mapped out into lines, with military precision, and on these were

built rows of little wooden huts, which were painted a neat and useful black.

The huts for married men and officers were of varying degrees of comfort and homeliness, but those for single men were like toy-boxes of wooden soldiers; it was only by doing it very tidily that you could (so to speak) put your pretty soldiers away at night when you had done playing with them, and get the lid to shut down.

But then tidiness is a virtue which—like patience—is its own reward. And nineteen men who keep themselves clean and their belongings cleaner; who have made their nineteen beds into easy-chairs before most people have got out of bed at all; whose tin pails are kept as bright as average teaspoons (to the envy of housewives and the shame of housemaids!); who establish a common and a holiday side to the reversible top of their one long table, and scrupulously scrub both; who have a place for everything and a discipline which obliges everybody to put everything in its place;—nineteen men, I say, with such habits, find more comfort and elbow-room in a hut than an outsider might believe possible, and hang up a photograph or two into the bargain.

But it may be at once conceded to the credit of the camp, that those who lived there thought better of it than those who did not, and that those who lived there longest were apt to like it best of all.

It was, however, regarded by different people from very opposite points of view, in each of which was some truth.

There were those to whom the place and the life were alike hateful.

They said that, from a soldier's standpoint, the life was one of exceptionally hard work, and uncertain stay, with no small proportion of the hardships and even risks of active service, and none of the more glorious chances of war.

That you might die of sunstroke on the march, or contract rheumatism, fever, or dysentery, under canvas, without drawing

Indian pay and allowances; and that you might ruin your uniform as rapidly as in a campaign, and never hope to pin a ribbon over its inglorious stains.

That the military society was too large to find friends quickly in the neighborhood, and that as to your neighbors in camp, they were sure to get marching orders just when you had learnt to like them. And if you did not like them—! (But for that matter, quarrelsome neighbors are much the same everywhere. And a boundary road between two estates will furnish as pretty a feud as the pump of a common back-yard.)

The haters of the camp said that it had every characteristic to disqualify it for a home; that it was ugly and crowded, without the appliances of civilization; that it was neither town nor country, and had the disadvantages of each without the merits of either.

That it was unshaded and unsheltered, that the lines were monotonous and yet confusing, and every road and parade-ground more dusty than another.

That the huts let in the frost in winter and the heat in summer, and were at once stuffy and draughty.

That the low roofs were like a weight upon your head, and that the torture was invariably brought to a climax on the hottest of the dog-days, when they were tarred and sanded in spite of your teeth; a process which did not ensure their being water-tight or snow-proof when the weather changed.

That the rooms had no cupboards, but an unusual number of doors, through which no tall man could pass without stooping.

That only the publicity and squalor of the back-premises of the "lines"—their drying clothes and crumbling mud walls, their coal-boxes and slop-pails—could exceed the depressing effects of the gardens in front, where such plants as were not uprooted by the winds perished of frost or drought, and where, if some gallant creeper had stood fast and covered the nakedness of your wooden hovel, the Royal Engineers would arrive one morning with as little announcement as the tar and sand men, and tear down the growth of years before you had finished shaving, for the purpose of repainting your outer walls.

On the other hand, there were those who had a great affection for Asholt, and affection never lacks arguments.

Admitting some hardships and blunders, the defenders of the camp fell back successfully upon statistics for a witness to the general health.

They said that if the camp was windy the breezes were exquisitely bracing, and the climate of that particular part of England such as would qualify it for a health-resort for invalids, were it only situated in a comparatively inaccessible part of the Pyrenees, instead of being within an hour or two of London.

That this fact of being within easy reach of town made the camp practically at the headquarters of civilization and refinement, whilst the simple and sociable ways of living, necessitated by hut-life in common, emancipated its select society from rival extravagance, and cumbersome formalities.

That the camp stood on the borders of the two counties of England which rank highest on the books of estate and house agents, and that if you did not think the country lovely and the neighborhood agreeable you must be hard to please.

That, as regards the Royal Engineers, it was one of your privileges to be hard to please, since you were entitled to their good offices; and if, after all, they sometimes failed to cure your disordered drains and smoky chimneys, you at any rate did not pay, as well suffer, which is the case in civil life.

That low doors to military quarters might be regarded as a practical joke on the part of authorities, who demand that soldiers shall be both tall and upright, but that man, whether military or not, is an adaptable animal and can get used to anything; and indeed it was only those officers whose thoughts were more active than their instincts who invariably crushed their best hats before starting for town.

That huts (if only they were a little higher!) had a great many advantages over small houses, which were best appreciated by those who had tried drawing lodging allowance and living in villas, and which

would be fully known if ever the lines were rebuilt in brick.

That on moonlit nights the airs that fanned the silent camp were as dry and wholesome as by day; that the song of the distant nightingale could be heard there; and finally, that from end to end of this dwelling-place of ten thousand to (on occasion) twenty thousand men, a woman might pass at midnight with greater safety than in the country lanes of a rural village or a police-protected thoroughfare of the metropolis.

But, in truth, the camp's best defence in the hearts of its defenders was that it was a camp,—military life in epitome, with all its defects and all its charm; not the least of which, to some whimsical minds, is, that it represents, as no other phase of society represents, the human pilgrimage in brief.

Here, be sudden partings, but frequent reunions; the charities and courtesies of an uncertain life lived largely in common; the hospitality of passing hosts to guests who tarry but a day.

Here, surely, should be the home of the sage as well as the soldier, where every hut might fitly carry the ancient motto, "Dwell as if about to depart," where work bears the nobler name of duty, and where the living, hastening on his business amid "the hurrys of this life," must pause and stand to salute the dead as he is carried by.

Bare and dusty are the parade-grounds, but they are thick with memories. Here were blest the colors that became a young man's shroud that they might not be a nation's shame. Here march and music welcome the coming and speed the parting regiments. On this parade the rising sun is greeted with gun-fire and trumpet clarions shriller than the cock, and there he sets to a like salute with tuck of drum. Here the young recruit drills, the warrior puts on his medal, the old pensioner steals back to watch them, and the soldier's children play—sometimes at fighting or flag-wagging,† but oftener at funerals!

(To be Continued.)

POLITENESS.

My little ones, do not be afraid of politeness—it will not hurt you. Have none of that false shame which crushes the life from so many of your good and noble impulses, and causes you to shrink from performing little acts of tenderness and love toward one another. Let your feet, your hands, your voice be the willing servants of that great master of politeness, the heart. Politeness teaches how to obey, gladly, fearlessly and openly. The truly polite child is a good son, a good daughter, for politeness teaches him the duty and respect he owes to his parents; he is a kind and grateful brother; his very willingness to help his sister makes her feel better and stronger. He is a true friend, for he scorns the unkind words that wound those who love him. Politeness and charity are twins—they make the true gentleman, the true gentlewoman, helpful, loving, unpretentious. The world would be better if the young boys and young girls, who are soon to be our men and women, would obey the watchword of true politeness, which is charity.—*Ram's Horn.*

THE BUSY BEE.

When you eat a spoonful of honey you have very little notion as to the amount of work and travel necessary to produce it. To make one pound of clover honey, bees must deprive 62,000 clover blossoms of their nectar, and to do this requires 3,750,000 visits to the blossoms by the bees. In other words, one bee to collect enough nectar to make one pound of honey must go from hive to flower and back 3,750,000 times. Then, when you think how far bees sometimes fly in search of these clover fields, oftener than not one or two miles from the hive, you will begin to get a small idea of the number of miles one of the industrious little creatures must travel in order that you may have the pound of honey that gives them so much trouble. It may also help you to understand why the bee is unamiable enough to sting you if you get in its way. When one has to work so hard to accomplish so little, it is quite irritating to be interfered with.

*Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."

† "Flag-wagging," a name among soldiers' children for signalling.