

grow a woman, and then if Bell does not care for me I'll marry you."

"Will you really? Thank you Hal. I don't think Bell will care enough for you. What's that?"

She started and drew closer to me, shuddering, and then looking down the walk I saw another figure—white and ghostlike enough in the uncertain moonlight. It was just turning towards the house, and even as I caught sight of it, it vanished.

"What is it, Hal?" whispered Milly. "Do you think it was Bell coming to look for me? Do come back just to the grass."

I went back with her, and watched her into the house. Then I turned and went on my way.

CHAPTER II.

During the stirring months which followed on our arrival in India, I had little time for thought still less for writing. Letters were a rarity; we men looked with curious eyes at the despatch-bags. Almost unconsciously I had allowed my hopes regarding Bell's first letter to get the better of my discretion, and found myself looking forward to the contents as a test of her real feelings towards me. She would surely say something to betray herself, either for love or against it. When the letter did come I was half-frightened to open it, and turned it over and over before I broke the seal. Bell never crossed her letters, and wrote a large hand, so there were four sheets of thick note-paper besides a carte of herself. Nothing could be kinder and more cousinly than the letter, and yet my heart sank, for not one single sentence could I in any way twist into anything more tender; and crumpling it up, carte and all, I thrust it into the breast of my jacket. I was still reading my dear old father's chapter of home news, the condition of the horses, the state of the crops and the hopes for the shooting season, when the bugle sounded, and we were again under arms. This time I got the worst of it.

The Sepoys had invented a sort of diabolical machine by fastening a shell with a long fuse into a bag of gunpowder; the powder of course blew up first, and they calculated that the soldiers, seeing a shell rolling about, would go up to have a look; nor were they far wrong in many cases. I knew nothing of the trick, and after the first explosion, took a short cut past the shell, and came in for the brunt of it, one piece smashing my arm, another peeling my shin. I have an indistinct notion of a terrible thud—hardly pain, and yet something horrible—and then I knew nothing of it all until the effects of chloroform, administered to facilitate the setting and dressing, going off, I was congratulated by the doctor.

"A narrow escape; an inch to the right, and Winchester had had his promotion,—this paper saved your life," and he held up Bell's crumpled letter, matted together and stained with blood. "Lucky for you the paper was thick," went on the Doctor; "I've known some queer shaves for life, but I never saw one to beat this. By the Lord, there goes the bugle again; it's little rest we get out here, and plenty of practice, though it's not much I'd care if they gave us fair play, but they don't." Sir Colin has his petticoats to the front again. I'll step in and tell the news when I get away, Harry. Sleep is the thing for you."

Next day we were in Lucknow, and the doctor, in a perfect fury of delight, was telling me of the wilful mistake made by the gallant "skye blues," when an orderly brought me my share of another mail.

"You must get your heart up, Harry," said the doctor, one day, "Sir Colin thinks the air here not over good for the sick. I'll have you made as comfortable as possible; we are to march to-night. And there's the devil to pay among the women: they're wanting to carry off every old kettle they're used this twelve months. Faith I'd rather be a doctor than a commissariat officer to-night, though it's Jack's choice, between the devil and the deep sea. You'll have a sleep at Dil Koosha without the lullaby of big guns, that's one comfort."

The doctor was as good as his word. I had

a palanquin on which I lay as comfortably as on my bed, and worse pain than mine would have been forgotten in the excitement of moving.

It was a glorious moonlight night, so bright that we could see where the bullets had pealed the plaster off the walls, or where round shot had rent the stones and mud asunder, leaving great yawning gaps. I heard not a few lamenting over the ruin of what had been a city of eastern splendour. I, for my part, was heartily thankful to get out of it, and feel, as I presently did, the pure country air thrilling through and round me. There was firing from the enemy going on in the distance; but so admirable were the precautions taken by Sir Colin, that no suspicion of our great movement reached the mutineers. Silently and stealthily the great body passed along through the desolated ground of what once had been the Rance's palace, thence to the road by the river, where the great excitement began, and where the enemy were actually within sight; so that the open space along which we had to pass was cloaked by screens of matting, behind which we passed with bated breath and an unuttered prayer of thankfulness to the wise old man who had contrived so ably for our safety.

Morning brought renewed life to the wounded and wearied throng, and I shall never forget the wild delight with which the rising sun was greeted. Women lifted up their voices and prayed and wept, kissing their children or friends; men with moistened eyes tried to laugh at the fun, but gave in to the excitement at last; the camp was in a buzz, and God and Sir Colin were thanked in every dialect, from the full roll of Connaught boys' brogue, to the rough rich burr of "Danny Newcassel."

Never had there been such a November; one had no right to be ill or weak. I had princely quarters, and got well apace. I astonished the doctor, I astonished myself, and what was more, I astonished the colonel, who kindly offered to send me home—an offer I declined. I will not say how much Bell's letters had to do with my determination to remain in India; perhaps I was a true soldier at heart, and having a taste for the service, had fairly enrolled myself in the soldier's lot. Any way, I did not go home, and by the time peace was restored I was fit for duty, and rejoicing in my promotion.

"Somebody has been telling me you are going home, Yeo," said General —, a few months after I had my company. "Don't be such a fool. You've had the kicks—stay and have the half-pence. We want a few fellows to stick to us, there will be a regular exodus before the next hot season, and plenty of fellows retiring. You'll soon have your majority, and then may do as you like."

"I'll think of it, general," said I, and while thinking of it, another letter came from Bell. "By Jove!" thought I, I'll show her I can be just as cool as she is; I won't go home."

And I did not. Next mail brought me intelligence of my father's sudden death. I wrote home, as I felt in duty bound, told Bell I had accepted an appointment which necessitated my remaining two years longer, and asked her to come out and be my wife; other women did so, and I thought she might. But it is well said that it requires two to make a bargain; Bell did not see it in the light I did, she was willing, she said, to wait. So two years glided by, and then I wrote again: again came a refusal, and in the pique of the moment I asked for a post then vacant, entailing still further service, so that very nearly six years had passed since I left England, before I made up my mind to brave my fate and come home for good.

The overland journey was much after the manner of overland journeys in general. A full complement of mammas and children, real widows, and what are popularly known as grass-widows, a sprinkling of men; many going on sick leave, one or two, like myself, giving up their soldiering for ever. There was the usual amount of flirtation, scandal, and jealousy, from which I managed to steer pretty clear, until I fell into the hands of a pretty little woman going home on leave, and who I soon found knew Devonshire. One day at tea some one began talking of matrimony. Mrs. Vigne gave us her

opinion, adding a story illustrative of her experience that set the whole table in a roar.

"I am going to Lynmouth too, Mrs. Vigne," I said; "I hope you won't cut me as you did your husband."

"Then you know Lynmouth; isn't it a miserable, dead-alive sort of place? nothing but artists, reading-parties, and High-church people to be seen. By-the-by, talking of Lynmouth, and apropos of marriage, my sister tells me a charming story about their great heiress, a Miss Larriston; I dare say you've heard of her,—the story is just the thing for a sensation novel; she has been engaged since she was in longclothes to a cousin, the reason being that each of them has half of what was once a whole estate, and there being a curse upon the place until some old rhyme is fulfilled; the rhyme is that,—

The curse of the Yeo shall be outrun,
When Larriston's girl weds Yeo's son.

Of course they hate each other, and of course the heiress has taken to the Church for consolation, and found it in the curate. My sister says she expects an elopement, and rather leans to the lady's side; now all my sympathies are with the poor man."

"They generally are, I am happy to see," said Captain Smith; "I am sure we ought to be awfully grateful, and I am sure the unlucky lover will appreciate your kindness. Yeo, here, will introduce you; I dare say he is some relation, as he is going down there."

I did not know whether Smith was throwing out a feeler, but determined to ignore my identity, and promised to effect the necessary introduction, and for the rest of the voyage had to take care of Mrs. Vigne.

After a week in London I went down to Lynmouth, the wholesome English July air giving a new zest to my life, and somehow or other awakening a strong desire to be with Bell, and a fierce resentment against the curate, which was neither mollified nor explained by the sight of the sweet green hills of Devon, the fair woodlands, and deep lanes through which the groom bowled me in the tax-cart when he drove over to meet me at Barnstaple, any more than by the old servant's conversation; for, after telling me of my dear father's last days, he launched off into family and county gossip; and, as I thought, purposely avoided speaking of Bell, a reticence against which I secretly fretted, considering that thereby hung a tale. Of Milly, her goodness, beauty, and, above all, her riding, he seemed never tired of talking, and when I reached home the same might be remarked of the housekeeper, until, determined to bring out something, I said: "So, the old Rector has gone, too, Mrs. Clarke?"

"Aye, sir, and more's the pity, for the new one don't like this place, and lives in London or elsewhere, but he keeps a curate who works like six ordinary parsons, up and out, early and late, riding and walking till you wonder he has a bit of flesh on his bones. He knows every man, woman, and child in the parish, what they want, and when it's the right time to give. Ho and Miss Bell are thick; and if it wasn't that I knowed the truth, sir, of her and you, I'd believe what the country says; but then I know's better, and more—they do say, he's just the same as a Roman priest, and could not marry."

All this did not tend to increase my satisfaction, although it did awaken a terrible, and to me an unaccountable tumult in my mind. The more I tried to analyze this, the more hopelessly perplexed I became, until it suddenly began to dawn upon me that perhaps, after all, I was in love with Bell. Then came the remembrance of her coolness; the six years collapsed—I read her letters over again, and, taking my stick, went off to the cottage. Bell was in the drawing room, it was too dark to see her face, but her hand lay passive and cold as lead in mine as we stood together, waiting my aunt's coming.

"It is a sad return, Bell," I said, and then her hand shook, but gave no sympathetic pressure. "One expects changes in six years," I went on, thinking of the curate, "but there are some harder to bear than death."

She drew her hand away and turned partly round; but, before she spoke, the door opened