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THE YOUNG AID-DE-CAMP.

"Oh, Edward," mourned Julia Harcourt to her brother, as she laid her head upon his shoulder, believing herself unmoved, "where will you be at this hour to-morrow evening?"

He answered only by an affectionate pressure of the hand which he held in his; the tears started in his eyes, but anxious to conceal his emotions, he turned to his father, and was about to address him.

"My children," said the General tenderly, "there is no need of concealment of feelings, which honor rather than disgrace our nature. You, Edward, will not make a worse soldier because your sister's tears have brought a corresponding sympathy to your eyes; nor will you, Julia, enjoy less the future honor of your brother, because you now weep that he must leave you. And think not," added he, in a voice which gradually lost its firmness as he continued to speak, "think not that the moment when a son is about to quit his parental roof, and engage in the busy scenes of life, is a painless one to a father. In him, to natural regret is joined a knowledge of the shoals and quicksands that lie in his path, and remembrance of these gives to the anxiety of maturity the acuteness of sorrow that properly belongs to youth." He paused, and then with greater steadiness continued:—"The path before you, however, is an honorable and an open one. Acquit yourself in it, therefore, as becomes a man and a Christian. But I will not now repeat the advice I have so earnestly given you, and the more so as I am not aware that I have omitted any material point of conduct. On one subject alone I have been less diffuse than you might probably have expected me to be, but this arose solely from its being too painful a one to dwell openly upon." He passed his hand over his brow, but could not conceal the agitation of his features:—"Here is a packet, however," added he, "which will supply the omission: read the narrative it contains attentively, and oh! may you escape the anguish that its writer has been so long doomed to feel!"

Edward received the paper with reverence, and the General now rising, fervently blessed both his children, and retired to rest.

This was the last evening that Edward Harcourt was to spend in his father's house previous to his joining his regiment, which was under sailing orders for Spain. He was a high-spirited amiable youth, the secret pride of his father, and the avowed delight of his sister. He had scarcely passed his seventeenth year; but in talents, manner and appearance, he was many years older. The next day saw him far on his journey towards the metropolis, where, having remained only sufficient time to equip himself, he proceeded to Plymouth, and was soon afterwards launched on the bosom of the ocean, under a favourable wind, and with companions whose spirits were almost as buoyant as his own.

He had hitherto been too much engaged to open the packet which the General had given him, or indeed scarcely to give it a thought; but he had now abundance of leisure for the purpose, and withdrawing himself from observation, he with no slight degree of interest, but unmingled with curiosity, broke the seal. The latter feeling had probably not obtained itself, but for the idea that it contained an exhibition of an occasional melancholy, which both he and his sister had observed in their father, and which had excited alike their surprise and commiseration. Loved and respected by them in the highest degree, they had carefully abstained from appearing to notice it, and had sought only by every delicate and tender attention, to win him from his abstraction, and to soothe him to composure and cheerfulness. Frequently, even in moments of paternal tenderness and delight, when his breast appeared to overflow with the purest felicity, a look of indescribable agony would ensue, and tears, which he endeavoured in vain to conceal, would start from his eyes.

A natural feeling of respect and delicacy made him pause before he could examine the paper which he held in his hand. This he

found to be a long letter from the General, who, after enforcing many excellent rules for his future conduct, thus proceeded:—

"And now, Edward, let me address you on a subject to which I attach the deepest importance. I mean that of settling. By every consideration, moral and divine—by every tie of affection to me, of allegiance to your king, and of duty to your God,—I charge you never to be either a principal or an accessory, in a crime which reason and religion alike condemn as utterly indefensible, although false honor and heatless sophistry have endeavoured to establish its propriety and necessity. Continue to preserve that control over your passions which has hitherto distinguished you; give no offence, and be not ready to receive one; enter into no dispute, and whilst with a manly firmness you obtain your own independence of thought and action, avoid all interference with that of others, never forgetting that when you become a soldier, you ceased not to be a Christian; but increase, rather than diminish, your obligations, by having dedicated that life to your king, which you received from your God, for the proper disposal of which you are now accountable to both.

"But if argument fail, let the recital I am about to make, effectually deter you from the commission of so heinous an offence. Yes, I will raise the veil that has long covered the anguish of my heart, although I am well aware that the effort will be most distressing to me, and that the exposure of past errors to a son's eyes must prove a bitter task to a father.

"I was early destined like yourself to the army, and entered upon life with prospects as fair as your own. My connexions were powerful, my fortune was good, and my friends consequently were numerous. Nature had done much for me, adventurous circumstances were few. My society was every where sought. I was a general favourite, and though reason pointed out the avowal of the attention I received, self-love and vanity resulted in the unmerited homage into a debt due my pecuniary merit. I became addicted to pleasure, grew haughty and impatient of control, and while I pursued gratifications which my better principles condemned, I allowed neither the inward monitor of my own breast, nor the remonstrances of my real friends, to have any influence over my actions. Real friends, perhaps, I had few; but I possessed one,—alas! how my heart throbs at the recollection! whose worth alone was sufficient to outweigh the loss of hundreds. Melville was my cousin by my mother's side—he, too, was an only son; but as his parents were by no means in affluent circumstances, he became at the death of his father entirely dependent upon mine. We had been brought up together, and he had hitherto shared in all the advantages which had been so liberally bestowed upon me. I fear he was much more attached to my person than I was alive to his merits. We were indeed very dissimilar. He was gentle, patient, endowed with extraordinary powers of self-control, moderate in all his desires, just, honourable, generous and brave; while equally correct in practice as in principle, his rectitude amidst all temptation remained unshaken. My tears fall fast at this noble testimony to his worth; alas! that the loss of blessings should best teach us their value.

"Melville had frequently, in forcible but gentle terms, remonstrated with me on my conduct. I at first listened to him without displeasure, and even with secret admiration of the manner he adopted towards me, but in proportion as my behaviour grew irregular, and the upbraids of my conscience more severe, his admonitions became less endurable. The sneers, also, of my profligate associates at his influence provoked me, and I gradually absented myself from his society, till at length I totally withdrew myself from him. Melville was much hurt by this procedure, and for a time endeavoured by every means to win back with confidence, but finding that he rather defeated than promoted his views by seeking me, he forbade to intrude. Often did my heart reproach me for the unmanliness and ingratitude of my conduct, and as often did I long for a renewal of that cordiality

which was once my happiness, and had always been my safety; but pride and the ridicule of my companions withheld me from making any advance towards a better understanding, and in the end I scarcely even deigned to speak to him.

"Among other evil propensities, I had contracted a love of gaming, to supply which even the liberal allowance of my father was inadequate. I became involved in debt, and was guilty of many petty acts of meanness, which at a former period of my life I should have abhorred. Alas! little did I think at the time that it was Melville, the honourable self-denying Melville, who out of the savings of his own comparatively scanty purse, preserved me frequently from exposure from my tradespeople. I thought neither of him nor of them; I was selfish, wilfully heedless and extravagant, merely because I would not allow myself to reflect.

"One evening I had played to a considerable amount, and had been particularly unfortunate. In my agitation, I drank largely, and thus the irritation of intoxication was added to the irritation of excited feeling. We were seated in our tent, for it was summer.—Melville passed us on his way to the guard-room. He cast, or I fancied that he cast, a look of peculiar meaning towards me. I was provoked at having been seen at all by him, and I turned myself from him with as little apparent intention as possible. He, however, turned back, and doing so approached the tent more nearly. This I thought was done for the express purpose of observation, and I felt exceedingly vexed, though I forbore to say a word. "What is the curious look looking at?" exclaimed one of my companions, "does he think that he is to mount guard here?" "No, no," replied another, "he is already on the watch." Harcourt, this will be a pretty tale to repeat to your father." I was almost mad at the suggestion, when unfortunately for both, he again passed, though yet apparently in haste. I sprang out, and in a voice of rage accused him of the meanness of watching me. He bore my abuse with calmness and in silence, my even an expression of pity was visible on his features, but this only inflamed me still more. I taxed him with an intention of betraying me to my father. Then, and then only, his eyes flashed with indignation. "It is false," said he warmly; "abominably false." He spoke only with the emphasis of outraged and insulted feeling, but my companions construed his words into that which was not to be endured by a gentleman, and insisted that an apology was due my injured honour. "I can make no apology," exclaimed Melville, "when I have committed no offence. My cousin must do as he pleases—he knows his own injustice too well to persist in it." Alas! I did not know it but I was too much disordered, too much goaded on by others to own it and—But I must hasten to the dreadful catastrophe. My companions insisted on a meeting, and that immediately; it took place—I had the first fire—it was fatal—Melville fell!

"The mists of passion and intoxication faded at once from my eyes. I ran to him and raised him in my arms. The cold dew of death was already gathering on his brow, but he was sensible to my affection and despair. "I have been greatly to blame," he uttered with great difficulty; "bear witness that I acquit him entirely of any evil intent towards me. Dear Harcourt, he more faintly murmured, "compose yourself, I entirely forgive you—he is kind to my poor mother." He feebly threw his arm around my neck, I bent to receive his last kiss, and sunk fainting to the ground.

"The affair was represented in a manner that exonerated me from punishment, and it was soon forgotten among my companions. I became, however, an altered man; and so far poor Melville had not died in vain. I rose rapidly in my profession; the most brilliant success attended me throughout my military career; rank, honour, and reputation, were liberally bestowed on me; nor was I less fortunate in private and domestic life. Happy in my friends, my wife, and my children; easy in my circumstances, and esteemed by society

in general, my lot has been blessed beyond that of others; but my facility has never been without severe alloy. The image of my bleeding and dying friend has pursued me every where, and mingled a drop of exquisite bitterness in my cup. Amidst the applause of assembled multitudes, or the congratulations of friends; in the endearments of conjugal love, or the fond delights of a parent, the remembrance of Melville has constantly risen to my imagination, and wrung my heart with agony. So might he have been honoured; so brightly might he have been his career; so tenderly might he have been loved by an amiable wife; and children, dutiful and affectionate as mine, might have clasped his knees and called him father—but for me. The still small voice of conscience has unremittingly denounced me to myself as a murderer, and all the tears of penitence that I have shed, are still inadequate to wash away the remembrance of my crime. Even the satisfaction and comfort which I have derived from the same sad source, for better knowledge of myself has taught me to regret the more severely the advantages of which I had deprived him. In the midst of youth, and as he would have owned, unprepared to meet his God, my hand shut the gates of repentance upon him, and sent him with all his frailties on his head, to that dread tribunal, from which there is neither appeal nor escape.

"But I will not press the melancholy subject further. I am sick at heart, and can only say, go, my beloved boy, avoid your father's example and be happy."

Edward read with deep attention and considerable emotion, his father's narrative:—"You shall be obeyed, dearest and best of parents," said he, as he carefully returned it to a place of safety. "Let it cost me what it may, I will never, never incur such a load of misery on my future years as you have described."

He landed safely at Lisbon, and proceeded with all speed to join the division to which his regiment was attached. Active operations had not yet commenced, though vigorous preparations were making for the ensuing campaign. The natural ardour of his disposition made him regret a delay, which deprived him of the opportunity that he so much desired of signaling himself. Time, however, was not suffered to hang heavily on his hands; the duties of his profession, and gaieties which his brother officers promoted among themselves, fully occupied every moment.

He was delighted with all he met with, and if a thought of home saddened him, it was only for an instant, and brighter hopes of proving himself more worthy of the affection of his beloved relatives, dissipated every other feeling. His good humour, high spirit, and honourable bearing, produced a general prepossession in his favour, and he found his society universally sought. The regiment was quartered in a town large indeed in size, but thinly inhabited. Returning one evening to his lodgings, in company with a young man of his own rank and age, who with himself had been dining with their commanding officer, he was suddenly startled by the loud shriek of a female. He paused a moment uncertain from whence it proceeded; but upon its being repeated, he immediately directed his steps to the spot, and beheld, by the bright beams of the moon, a female struggling to free herself from the male embraces of a man whose dress proclaimed him a British officer. Edward advanced without hesitation, and in a firm voice desired him to desist. He was answered, however, only by a command to cease from interference; a command which was at once disobeyed, upon his assistance being implored by the female, whom he now discovered to be a Spaniard. He forcibly separated her from her persecutor, who exasperated more probably by the intrusion of a stranger than by any other consideration, furiously drew his sword, and bade him stand at his guard. The party to which he belonged had by this time joined them. Edward put back the weapon which was held against him, and telling him to reserve its use for a more proper occasion, walked on. His antagonist, however, followed,