

The Crisis, Volume 7

Winston Churchill

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THE CRISIS

By Winston Churchill

Volume 7.

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE ARMIES OF THE WEST

We are at Memphis,--for a while,--and the Christmas season is approaching once more. And yet we must remember that war recognizes no Christmas, nor Sunday, nor holiday. The brown river, excited by rains, whirled seaward between his banks of yellow clay. Now the weather was crisp and cold, now hazy and depressing, and again a downpour. Memphis had never seen such activity. A spirit possessed the place, a restless spirit called William T. Sherman. He prodded Memphis and laid violent hold of her. She groaned,

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protested, turned over, and woke up, peopled by a new people. When these walked, they ran, and they wore a blue uniform. They spoke rapidly and were impatient. Rain nor heat nor tempest kept them in. And yet they joked, and Memphis laughed (what was left of her), and recognized a bond of fellowship. The General joked, and the Colonels and the Commissary and the doctors, down to the sutlers and teamsters and the salt tars under Porter, who cursed the dishwater Mississippi, and also a man named Eads, who had built the new-fangled iron boxes officially known as gunboats. The like of these had never before been seen in the waters under the earth. The loyal citizens--loyal to the South--had been given permission to leave the city. The General told the assistant quartermaster to hire their houses and slaves for the benefit of the Federal Government. Likewise he laid down certain laws to the Memphis papers defining treason. He gave out his mind freely to that other army of occupation, the army of speculation, that flocked thither with permits to trade in cotton. The speculators gave the Confederates gold, which they needed most, for the bales, which they could not use at all.

The forefathers of some of these gentlemen were in old Egypt under Pharaoh--for whom they could have had no greater respect and fear than their descendants had in New Egypt for Grant or Sherman. Yankees were there likewise in abundance. And a certain acquaintance of ours materially added to his fortune by selling in Boston the cotton which cost him fourteen cents, at thirty cents.

One day the shouting and the swearing and the running to and fro came to a climax. Those floating freaks which were all top and drew nothing, were loaded down to the guards with army stores and animals and wood and men, --men who came from every walk in life.

Whistles bellowed, horses neighed. The gunboats chased hither and thither, and at length the vast processions paddled down the stream with naval precision, under the watchful eyes of a real admiral.

Residents of Memphis from the river's bank watched the pillar of smoke fade to the southward and ruminated on the fate of Vicksburg. The General paced the deck in thought. A little later he wrote to the Commander-in-Chief at Washington, "The valley of the Mississippi is America."

Vicksburg taken, this vast Confederacy would be chopped in two.

Night fell to the music of the paddles, to the scent of the officers' cigars, to the blood-red vomit of the tall stacks and the smoky flame of the torches. Then Christmas Day dawned, and there was Vicksburg lifted two hundred feet above the fever swamps, her court-house shining in the morning sun. Vicksburg, the well-nigh impregnable key to America's highway. When old Vick made his plantation on the Walnut Hills, he chose a site for a fortress of the future Confederacy that Vauban would have delighted in.

Yes, there were the Walnut Hills, high bluffs separated from the Mississippi by tangled streams and bayous, and on their crests the Parrotts scowled. It was a queer Christmas Day indeed, bright and warm; no snow, no turkeys nor mince pies, no wine, but just hardtack and bacon and foaming brown water.

On the morrow the ill-assorted fleet struggled up the sluggish Yazoo, past impenetrable forests where the cypress clutched at the keels, past

long-deserted cotton fields, until it came at last to the black ruins of a home. In due time the great army was landed. It spread out by brigade and division and regiment and company, the men splashing and paddling through the Chickasaw and the swamps toward the bluffs. The Parrotts began to roar. A certain regiment, boldly led, crossed the bayou at a narrow place and swept resistless across the sodden fields to where the bank was steepest. The fire from the battery scorched the hair of their heads. But there they stayed, scooping out the yellow clay with torn hands, while the Parrotts, with lowered muzzles, ploughed the slope with shells. There they stayed, while the blue lines quivered and fell back through the forests on that short winter's afternoon, dragging their wounded from the stagnant waters. But many were left to die in agony in the solitude.

Like a tall emblem of energy, General Sherman stood watching the attack and repulse, his eyes ever alert. He paid no heed to the shells which tore the limbs from the trees about him, or sent the swamp water in thick spray over his staff. Now and again a sharp word broke from his lips, a forceful home thrust at one of the leaders of his columns.

"What regiment stayed under the bank?"

"Sixth Missouri, General," said an aide, promptly.

The General sat late in the Admiral's gunboat that night, but when he returned to his cabin in the Forest Queen, he called for a list of officers of the Sixth Missouri. His finger slipping down the roll paused at a name among the new second lieutenants.

"Did the boys get back?" he asked. "Yes, General, when it fell dark."

"Let me see the casualties,--quick."

That night a fog rolled up from the swamps, and in the morning jack-staff was hid from pilot-house. Before the attack could be renewed, a political general came down the river with a letter in his pocket from Washington, by virtue of which he took possession of the three army core, and their chief, subpoenaed the fleet and the Admiral, and went off to capture Arkansas Post.

Vicksburg had a breathing spell.

Three weeks later, when the army was resting at Napoleon, Arkansas, a self-contained man, with a brown beard arrived from Memphis, and took command. This way General U. S. Grant. He smoked incessantly in his cabin. He listened. He spoke but seldom. He had look in his face that boded ill to any that might oppose him. Time and labor be counted as nothing, compared with the accomplishment of an object. Back to Vicksburg paddled the fleet and transports. Across the river from the city, on the pasty mud behind the levee's bank were dumped Sherman's regiments, condemned to week of ditch-digging, that the gunboats might arrive at the bend of the Mississippi below by a canal, out of reach of the batteries. Day in and day out they labored, officer and men. Sawing off stumps under the water, knocking poisonous snakes by scores from the branches, while the river rose and rose and rose, and the rain crept by inches under their tent flies, and the enemy walked the parapet of Vicksburg and laughed. Two gunboats accomplished the feat of running the batteries, that their smiles might be sobered.

To the young officers who were soiling their uniform with the grease of saws, whose only fighting was against fever and water snakes, the news of an expedition into the Vicksburg side of the river was hailed with caps in the air. To be sure, the saw and axe, and likewise the levee and the snakes, were to be there, too. But there was likely to be a little fighting. The rest of the corps that was to stay watched grimly as the detachment put off in the little 'Diligence' and 'Silver Wave'.

All the night the smoke-pipes were battling against the boughs of oak and cottonwood, and snapping the trailing vines. Some other regiments went by another route. The ironclads, followed in hot haste by General Sherman in a navy tug, had gone ahead, and were even then shoving with their noses great trunks of trees in their eagerness to get behind the Rebels. The Missouri regiment spread out along the waters, and were soon waist deep, hewing a path for the heavier transports to come. Presently the General came back to a plantation half under water, where Black Bayou joins Deer Creek, to hurry the work in cleaning out that Bayou. The light transports meanwhile were bringing up more troops from a second detachment. All through the Friday the navy great guns were heard booming in the distance, growing quicker and quicker, until the quivering air shook the hanging things in that vast jungle. Saws stopped, and axes were poised over shoulders, and many times that day the General lifted his head anxiously. As he sat down in the evening in a slave cabin redolent with corn pone and bacon, the sound still hovered among the trees and rolled along the still waters.

The General slept lightly. It was three o'clock Saturday morning when the sharp challenge of a sentry broke the silence. A negro, white eyed, bedraggled, and muddy, stood in the candle light under the charge of a young lieutenant. The officer saluted, and handed the General a roll of tobacco.

"I found this man in the swamp, sir. He has a message from the Admiral--"

The General tore open the roll and took from it a piece of tissue paper which he spread out and held under the candle. He turned to a staff officer who had jumped from his bed and was hurrying into his coat.

"Porter's surrounded," he said. The order came in a flash. "Kilby Smith and all men here across creek to relief at once. I'll take canoe through bayou to Hill's and hurry reinforcements."

The staff officer paused, his hand on the latch of the door.

"But your escort, General. You're not going through that sewer in a canoe without an escort!"

"I guess they won't look for a needle in that haystack," the General answered. For a brief second he eyed the lieutenant. "Get back to your regiment, Brice, if you want to go," he said.

Stephen saluted and went out. All through the painful march that followed, though soaked in swamp water and bruised by cypress knees, he thought of Sherman in his canoe, winding unprotected through the black labyrinth, risking his life that more men might be brought to the rescue of the gunboats.

The story of that rescue has been told most graphically by Sherman himself. How he picked up the men at work on the bayou and marched them

on a coal barge; how he hitched the barge to a navy tug; how he met the little transport with a fresh load of troops, and Captain Elijah Brent's reply when the General asked if he would follow him. "As long as the boat holds together, General." And he kept his word. The boughs hammered at the smoke-pipes until they went by the board, and the pilothouse fell like a pack of cards on the deck before they had gone three miles and a half. Then the indomitable Sherman disembarked, a lighted candle in his hand, and led a stiff march through thicket and swamp and breast-deep backwater, where the little drummer boys carried their drums on their heads. At length, when they were come to some Indian mounds, they found a picket of three, companies of the force which had reached the flat the day before, and had been sent down to prevent the enemy from obstructing further the stream below the fleet.

"The Admiral's in a bad way, sir," said the Colonel who rode up to meet the General. "He's landlocked. Those clumsy ironclads of his can't move backward or forward, and the Rebs have been peppering him for two days."

Just then a fusillade broke from the thickets, nipping the branches from the cottonwoods about them.

"Form your line," said the General. "Drive 'em out."

The force swept forward, with the three picket companies in the swamp on the right. And presently they came in sight of the shapeless ironclads with their funnels belching smoke, a most remarkable spectacle. How Porter had pushed them there was one of the miracles of the war.

Then followed one of a thousand memorable incidents in the life of a memorable man. General Sherman, jumping on the bare back of a scrawny horse, cantered through the fields. And the bluejackets, at sight of that familiar figure, roared out a cheer that might have shaken the drops from the wet boughs. The Admiral and the General stood together on the deck, their hands clasped. And the Colonel astutely remarked, as he rode up in answer to a summons, that if Porter was the only man whose daring could have pushed a fleet to that position, Sherman was certainly the only man who could have got him out of it.

"Colonel," said the General, "that move was well executed, sir. Admiral, did the Rebs put a bullet through your rum casks? We're just a little tired. And now," he added, wheeling on the Colonel when each had a glass in his hand, "who was in command of that company on the right, in the swamp? He handled them like a regular."

"He's a second lieutenant, General, in the Sixth Missouri. Captain wounded at Hindman, and first lieutenant fell out down below. His name is Brice, I believe."

"I thought so," said the General.

Some few days afterward, when the troops were slopping around again at Young's Point, opposite Vicksburg, a gentleman arrived on a boat from St. Louis. He paused on the levee to survey with concern and astonishment the flood of waters behind it, and then asked an officer the way to General Sherman's headquarters. The officer, who was greatly impressed by the gentleman's looks, led him at once to a trestle bridge which spanned the distance from the levee bank over the flood to a house up to its first floor in the backwaters. The orderly saluted.

"Who shall I say, sir?"

The officer looked inquiringly at the gentleman, who gave his name.

The officer could not repress a smile at the next thing that happened. Out hurried the General himself, with both hands outstretched.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, "if it isn't Brinsmade. Come right in, come right in and take dinner. The boys will be glad to see you. I'll send and tell Grant you're here. Brinsmade, if it wasn't for you and your friends on the Western Sanitary Commission, we'd all have been dead of fever and bad food long ago." The General sobered abruptly. "I guess a good many of the boys are laid up now," he added.

"I've come down to do what I can, General," responded Mr. Brinsmade, gravely. "I want to go through all the hospitals to see that our nurses are doing their duty and that the stores are properly distributed."

"You shall, sir, this minute," said the General. He dropped instantly the affairs which he had on hand, and without waiting for dinner the two gentlemen went together through the wards where the fever raged. The General surprised his visitor by recognizing private after private in the cots, and he always had a brief word of cheer to brighten their faces, to make them follow him with wistful eyes as he passed beyond them. "That's poor Craig," he would say, "corporal, Third Michigan. They tell me he can't live," and "That's Olcott, Eleventh Indiana. Good God!" cried the General, when they were out in the air again, "how I wish some of these cotton traders could get a taste of this fever. They keep well--the vultures--And by the way, Brinsmade, the man who gave me no peace at all at Memphis was from your city. Why, I had to keep a whole corps on duty to watch him."

"What was his name, sir?" Mr. Brinsmade asked.

"Hopper!" cried the General, with feeling. "Eliphalet Hopper. As long as I live I shall never forget it. How the devil did he get a permit? What are they about at Washington?"

"You surprise me," said Mr. Brinsmade. "He has always seemed inoffensive, and I believe he is a prominent member of one of our churches."

"I guess that's so," answered the General, dryly. "I ever I set eyes on him again, he's clapped into the guardhouse. He knows it, too."

"Speaking of St. Louis, General," said Mr. Brinsmade, presently, "have you ever heard of Stephen Brice? joined your army last autumn. You may remember talking to him one evening at my house."

"He's one of my boys!" cried the General. "Remember him? Guess I do!" He paused on the very brink of relating again the incident at Camp Jackson, when Stephen had saved the life of Mr. Brinsmade's own son. "Brinsmade, for three days I've had it on my mind to send for that boy. I'll have him at headquarters now. I like him," cried General Sherman, with tone and gesture there was no mistaking. And good Mr. Brinsmade, who liked Stephen, too, rejoiced at the story he would have to tell the widow. "He has spirit, Brinsmade. I told him to let me know when he was ready to go to war. No such thing. He never came near me. The first thing I hear of him is that he's digging holes in the clay of Chickasaw Bluff, and his cap is fanned off by the blast of a Parrott six feet above his head. Next

thing he turns up on that little expedition we took to get Porter to sea again. When we got to the gunboats, there was Brice's company on the flank. He handled those men surprisingly, sir--surprisingly. I shouldn't have blamed the boy if one or two Rebs got by him. But no, he swept the place clean." By this time they had come back to the bridge leading to headquarters, and the General beckoned quickly to an orderly.

"My compliments to Lieutenant Stephen Brice, Sixth Missouri, and ask him to report here at once. At once, you understand!"

"Yes, General."

It so happened that Mr. Brice's company were swinging axes when the orderly arrived, and Mr. Brice had an axe himself, and was up to his boot tops in yellow mud.

The orderly, who had once been an Iowa farmer, was near grinning when he gave the General's message and saw the lieutenant gazing ruefully at his clothes.

Entering headquarters, Stephen paused at the doorway of the big room where the officers of the different staffs were scattered about, smoking, while the negro servants were removing the dishes from the table. The sunlight, reflected from the rippling water outside, danced on the ceiling. At the end of the room sat General Sherman, his uniform, as always, a trifle awry. His soft felt hat with the gold braid was tilted forward, and his feet, booted and spurred, were crossed. Small wonder that the Englishman who sought the typical American found him in Sherman.

The sound that had caught Stephen's attention was the General's voice, somewhat high-pitched, in the key that he used in telling a story. These were his closing words.

"Sin gives you a pretty square deal, boys, after all. Generally a man says, 'Well, I can resist, but I'll have my fun just this once.' That's the way it happens. They tell you that temptation comes irresistibly. Don't believe it. Do you, Mr. Brice? Come over here, sir. Here's a friend of yours."

Stephen made his way to the General, whose bright eyes wandered rapidly over him as he added:

"This is the condition my officers report in, Brinsmade,--mud from head to heel."

Stephen had sense enough to say nothing, but the staff officers laughed, and Mr. Brinsmade smiled as he rose and took Stephen's hand.

"I am delighted to see that you are well, sir," said he, with that formal kindness which endeared him to all. "Your mother will be rejoiced at my news of you. You will be glad to hear that I left her well, Stephen."

Stephen inquired for Mrs. Brinsmade and Anne.

"They are well, sir, and took pleasure in adding to a little box which your mother sent. Judge Whipple put in a box of fine cigars, although he deplores the use of tobacco."

"And the Judge, Mr. Brinsmade--how is he?"

The good gentleman's face fell.

"He is ailing, sir, it grieves me to say. He is in bed, sir. But he is ably looked after. Your mother desired to have him moved to her house, but he is difficult to stir from his ways, and he would not leave his little room. He is ably nursed. We have got old Nancy, Hester's mother, to stay with him at night, and Mrs. Brice divides the day with Miss Jinny Carvel, who comes in from Bellegarde every afternoon."

"Miss Carvel?" exclaimed Stephen, wondering if he heard aright. And at the mention of her name he tingled.

"None other, sir," answered Mr. Brinsmade. "She has been much honored for it. You may remember that the Judge was a close friend of her father's before the war. And--well, they quarrelled, sir. The Colonel went South, you know."

"When--when was the Judge taken ill, Mr. Brinsmade?" Stephen asked. The thought of Virginia and his mother caring for him together was strangely sweet.

"Two days before I left, sir, Dr. Polk had warned him not to do so much. But the Doctor tells me that he can see no dangerous symptoms."

Stephen inquired now of Mr. Brinsmade how long he was to be with them.

"I am going on to the other camps this afternoon," said he. "But I should like a glimpse of your quarters, Stephen, if you will invite me. Your mother would like a careful account of you, and Mr. Whipple, and--your many friends in St. Louis."

"You will find my tent a little wet, air," replied Stephen, touched.

Here the General, who had been sitting by watching them with a very curious expression, spoke up.

"That's hospitality for you, Brinsmade!"

Stephen and Mr. Brinsmade made their way across plank and bridge to Stephen's tent, and his mess servant arrived in due time with the package from home. But presently, while they sat talking of many things, the canvas of the fly was thrust back with a quick movement, and who should come stooping in but General Sherman himself. He sat down on a cracker box. Stephen rose confusedly.

"Well, well, Brice," said the General, winking at Mr. Brinsmade, "I think you might have invited me to the feast. Where are those cigars Mr. Brinsmade was talking about?"

Stephen opened the box with alacrity. The General chose one and lighted it.

"Don't smoke, eh?" he inquired. "Why, yes, sir, when I can."

"Then light up, sir," said the General, "and sit down, I've been thinking lately of court-martialing you, but I decided to come 'round and talk it over with you first. That isn't strictly according to the rules of the service. Look here, Mr. Brice, why did you leave St. Louis?"

"They began to draft, sir, and I couldn't stand it any longer."

"But you wouldn't have been drafted. You were in the Home Guards, if I remember right. And Mr. Brinsmade tells me you were useful in many ways. What was your rank in the Home Guards?"

"Lieutenant colonel, sir."

"And what are you here?"

"A second lieutenant in temporary command, General." "You have commanded men?"

"Not in action, sir. I felt that that was different."

"Couldn't they do better for you than a second-lieutenancy?"

Stephen did not reply at once, Mr. Brinsmade spoke up, "They offered him a lieutenant-colonelcy."

The General was silent a moment: Then he said "Do you remember meeting me on the boat when I was leaving St. Louis, after the capture of Fort Henry?"

Stephen smiled. "Very well, General," he replied, General Sherman leaned forward.

"And do you remember I said to you, 'Brice, when you get ready to come into this war, let me know.' Why didn't you do it?"

Stephen thought a minute. Then he said gravely, but with just a suspicion of humor about his mouth:-- "General, if I had done that, you wouldn't be here in my tent to-day."

Like lightning the General was on his feet, his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

"By gad, sir," he cried, delighted, "so I wouldn't."

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE MEETING

The story of the capture of Vicksburg is the old, old story of failure turned into success, by which man is made immortal. It involves the history of a general who never retraced his steps, who cared neither for mugwump murmurs nor political cabals, who took both blame and praise with equanimity. Through month after month of discouragement, and work gone for naught, and fever and death, his eyes never left his goal. And by grace of the wisdom of that President who himself knew sorrow and suffering and defeat and unjust censure, General Grant won.

Boldness did it. The canal abandoned, one red night fleet and transports swept around the bend and passed the city's heights, on a red river. The Parrotts and the Dahlgrens roared, and the high bluffs flung out the

sound over the empty swamp land.

Then there came the landing below, and the cutting loose from a base --unheard of. Corps behind cursed corps ahead for sweeping the country clear of forage. Battles were fought. Confederate generals in Mississippi were bewildered.

One night, while crossing with his regiment a pontoon bridge, Stephen Brice heard a shout raised on the farther shore. Sitting together on a log under a torch, two men in slouch hats were silhouetted. That one talking with rapid gestures was General Sherman. The impassive profile of the other, the close-cropped beard and the firmly held cigar that seemed to go with it,--Stephen recognized as that of the strange Captain Grant who had stood beside him in the street by the Arsenal He had not changed a whit. Motionless, he watched corps after corps splash by, artillery, cavalry, and infantry, nor gave any sign that he heard their plaudits.

At length the army came up behind the city to a place primeval, where the face of the earth was sore and tortured, worn into deep gorges by the rains, and flung up in great mounds. Stripped of the green magnolias and the cane, the banks of clay stood forth in hideous yellow nakedness, save for a lonely stunted growth, or a bare trunk that still stood tottering on the edge of a bank its pitiful withered roots reaching out below. The May weather was already sickly hot.

First of all there was a murderous assault, and a still more murderous repulse. Three times the besiegers charged, sank their color staffs into the redoubts, and three times were driven back. Then the blue army settled into the earth and folded into the ravines. Three days in that narrow space between the lines lay the dead and wounded suffering untold agonies in the moist heat. Then came a truce to bury the dead, to bring back what was left of the living.

The doomed city had no rest. Like clockwork from the Mississippi's banks beyond came the boom and shriek of the coehorns on the barges. The big shells hung for an instant in the air like birds of prey, and then could be seen swooping down here and there, while now and anon a shaft of smoke rose straight to the sky, the black monument of a home.

Here was work in the trenches, digging the flying sap by night and deepening it by day, for officers and men alike. From heaven a host of blue ants could be seen toiling in zigzags forward, ever forward, along the rude water-cuts and through the hills. A waiting carrion from her vantage point on high marked one spot then another where the blue ants disappeared, and again one by one came out of the burrow to hurry down the trench,--each with his ball of clay.

In due time the ring of metal and sepulchred voices rumbled in the ground beneath the besieged. Counter mines were started, and through the narrow walls of earth commands and curses came. Above ground the saps were so near that a strange converse became the rule. It was "Hello, Reb!" "Howdy, Yank!" Both sides were starving, the one for tobacco and the other for hardtack and bacon. These necessities were tossed across, sometimes wrapped in the Vicksburg news-sheet printed on the white side of a homely green wall paper. At other times other amenities were indulged in. Hand-grenades were thrown and shells with lighted fuses rolled down on the heads of acquaintances of the night before, who replied from wooden coehorns hooped with iron.

The Union generals learned (common item in a siege) that the citizens of Vicksburg were eating mule meat. Not an officer or private in the Vicksburg armies who does not remember the 25th of June, and the hour of three in an afternoon of pitiless heat. Silently the long blue files wound into position behind the earth barriers which hid them from the enemy, coiled and ready to strike when the towering redoubt on the Jackson road should rise heavenwards. By common consent the rifle crack of day and night was hushed, and even the Parrotts were silent. Stillness closed around the white house of Shirley once more, but not the stillness it had known in its peaceful homestead days. This was the stillness of the death prayer. Eyes staring at the big redoubt were dimmed. At last, to those near, a little wisp of blue smoke crept out.

Then the earth opened with a quake. The sun was darkened, and a hot blast fanned the upturned faces. In the sky, through the film of shattered clay, little black dots scurried, poised, and fell again as arms and legs and head less trunks and shapeless bits of wood and iron. Scarcely had the dust settled when the sun caught the light of fifty thousand bayonets, and a hundred shells were shrieking across the crater's edge. Earth to earth, alas, and dust to dust! Men who ran across that rim of a summer's after-noon died in torture under tier upon tier of their comrades,--and so the hole was filled.

An upright cannon marks the spot where a scrawny oak once stood on a scarred and baked hillside, outside of the Confederate lines at Vicksburg. Under the scanty shade of that tree, on the eve of the Nation's birthday, stood two men who typified the future and the past. As at Donelson, a trick of Fortune's had delivered one comrade of old into the hands of another. Now she chose to kiss the one upon whom she had heaped obscurity and poverty and contumely. He had ceased to think or care about Fortune. And hence, being born a woman, she favored him.

The two armies watched and were still. They noted the friendly greeting of old comrades, and after that they saw the self-contained Northerner biting his cigar, as one to whom the pleasantries of life were past and gone. The South saw her General turn on his heel. The bitterness of his life was come. Both sides honored him for the fight he had made. But war does not reward a man according to his deserts.

The next day--the day our sundered nation was born Vicksburg surrendered: the obstinate man with the mighty force had conquered. See the gray regiments marching silently in the tropic heat into the folds of that blue army whose grip has choked them at last. Silently, too, the blue coats stand, pity and admiration on the brick-red faces. The arms are stacked and surrendered, officers and men are to be paroled when the counting is finished. The formations melt away, and those who for months have sought each other's lives are grouped in friendly talk. The coarse

army bread is drawn eagerly from the knapsacks of the blue, smoke quivers above a hundred fires, and the smell of frying bacon brings a wistful look into the gaunt faces. Tears stand in the eyes of many a man as he eats the food his Yankee brothers have given him on the birthday of their country.

Within the city it is the same. Stephen Brice, now a captain in General Lauman's brigade, sees with thanksgiving the stars and stripes flutter from the dome of that court-house which he had so long watched from afar.

Later on, down a side street, he pauses before a house with its face

blown away. On the verge of one of its jagged floors is an old four-posted bed, and beside it a child's cot is standing pitifully,--the tiny pillow still at the head and the little sheets thrown across the foot. So much for one of the navy's shells.

While he was thinking of the sadness of it all, a little scene was acted: the side door of the house opened, a weeping woman came out, and with her was a tall Confederate Colonel of cavalry. Gallantly giving her his arm, he escorted her as far as the little gate, where she bade him good by with much feeling. With an impulsive movement he drew some money from his pocket, thrust it upon her, and started hurriedly away that he might not listen to her thanks. Such was his preoccupation that he actually brushed into Stephen, who was standing beside a tree. He stopped and bowed.

"Excuse me, seh," he said contritely. "I beg your pardon, seh."

"Certainly," said Stephen, smiling; it was my fault for getting in your way."

"Not at all, seh," said the cavalry Colonel; "my clumsiness, seh." He did not pass on, but stood pulling with some violence a very long mustache. "Damn you Yankees," he continued, in the same amiable tone, "you've brought us a heap of misfortune. Why, seh, in another week we'd been fo'ced to eat niggers."

The Colonel made such a wry face that Stephen laughed in spite of himself. He had marked the man's charitable action, and admired his attempt to cover it. The Colonel seemed to be all breadth, like a card. His shoulders were incredible. The face was scant, perchance from lack of food, the nose large, with a curved rim, and the eyes blue gray. He wore clay-flecked cavalry boots, and was six feet five if an inch, so that Stephen's six seemed insignificant beside him.

"Captain," he said, taking in Stephen's rank, "so we won't qua'l as to who's host heah. One thing's suah," he added, with a twinkle, "I've been heah longest. Seems like ten yeahs since I saw the wife and children down in the Palmetto State. I can't offer you a dinner, seh. We've eaten all the mules and rats and sugar cane in town." (His eye seemed to interpolate that Stephen wouldn't be there otherwise.) "But I can offer you something choicer than you have in the No'th."

Whereupon he drew from his hip a dented silver flask. The Colonel remarked that Stephen's eyes fell on the coat of arms.

"Prope'ty of my grandfather, seh, of Washington's Army. My name is Jennison,--Catesby Jennison, at your service, seh," he said. "You have the advantage of me, Captain."

"My name is Brice," said Stephen.

The big Colonel bowed decorously, held out a great, wide hand, and thereupon unscrewed the flask. Now Stephen had never learned to like straight whiskey, but he took down his share without a face. The exploit seemed to please the Colonel, who, after he likewise had done the liquor justice, screwed on the lid with ceremony, offered Stephen his arm with still greater ceremony, and they walked off down the street together. Stephen drew from his pocket several of Judge Whipple's cigars, to which his new friend gave unqualified praise.

On every hand Vicksburg showed signs of hard usage. Houses with gaping chasms in their sides, others mere heaps of black ruins; great trees felled, cabins demolished, and here and there the sidewalk ploughed across from curb to fence.

"Lordy," exclaimed the Colonel. "Lordy I how my ears ache since your damned coehorns have stopped. The noise got to be silence with us, seh, and yesterday I reckoned a hundred volcanoes had bust. Tell me," said he "when the redoubt over the Jackson road was blown up, they said a nigger came down in your lines alive. Is that so?"

"Yes," said Stephen, smiling; "he struck near the place where my company was stationed. His head ached a mite. That seemed to be all."

"I reckon he fell on it," said Colonel Catesby Jennison, as if it were a matter of no special note.

"And now tell me something," said Stephen. "How did you burn our sap-rollers?"

This time the Colonel stopped, and gave himself up to hearty laughter.

"Why, that was a Yankee trick, sure enough," he cried. "Some ingenious cuss soaked port fire in turpentine, and shot the wad in a large-bore musket."

"We thought you used explosive bullets."

The Colonel laughed again, still more heartily. "Explosive bullets! --Good Lord, it was all we could do to get percussion caps. Do you know how we got percussion caps, seh? Three of our officers--dare-devils, seh --floated down the Mississippi on logs. One fellow made his way back with two hundred thousand. He's the pride of our Vicksburg army. Not afraid of hell. A chivalrous man, a forlorn-hope man. The night you ran the batteries he and some others went across to your side in skiffs--in skiffs, seh, I say--and set fire to the houses in De Soto, that we might see to shoot. And then he came back in the face of our own batteries and your guns. That man was wounded by a trick of fate, by a cussed bit of shell from your coehorns while eating his dinner in Vicksburg. He's pretty low, now, poor fellow," added the Colonel, sadly.

"Where is he?" demanded Stephen, fired with a desire to see the man.

"Well, he ain't a great ways from here," said the Colonel. "Perhaps you might be able to do something for him," he continued thoughtfully. "I'd hate to see him die. The doctor says he'll pull through if he can get care and good air and good food." He seized Stephen's arm in a fierce grip. "You ain't fooling?" he said.

"Indeed I am not," said Stephen.

"No," said the Colonel, thoughtfully, as to himself, "you don't look like the man to fool."

Whereupon he set out with great strides, in marked contrast to his former languorous gait, and after a while they came to a sort of gorge, where the street ran between high banks of clay. There Stephen saw the magazines which the Confederates had dug out, and of which he had heard. But he saw something, too, of which he had not heard, Colonel Catesby

Jennison stopped before an open doorway in the yellow bank and knocked. A woman's voice called softly to him to enter.

They went into a room hewn out of the solid clay. Carpet was stretched on the floor, paper was on the walls, and even a picture. There was a little window cut like a port in a prison cell, and under it a bed, beside which a middle-aged lady was seated. She had a kindly face which seemed to Stephen a little pinched as she turned to them with a gesture of restraint. She pointed to the bed, where a sheet lay limply over the angles of a wasted frame. The face was to the wall.

"Hush!" said the lady,--"it is the first time in two days that he has slept."

But the sleeper stirred wearily, and woke with a start. He turned over. The face, so yellow and peaked, was of the type that grows even more handsome in sickness, and in the great fever-stricken eyes a high spirit burned. For an instant only the man stared at Stephen, and then he dragged himself to the wall.

The eyes of the other two were both fixed on the young Union Captain.

"My God!" cried Jennison, seizing Stephen's rigid arm, "does he look as bad as that? We've seen him every day."

"I--I know him," answered Stephen. He stepped quickly to the bedside, and bent over it. "Colfax!" he said. "Colfax!"

"This is too much, Jennison," came from the bed a voice that was pitifully weak; "why do you bring Yankees in here?"

"Captain Brice is a friend of yours, Colfax," said the Colonel, tugging at his mustache.

"Brice?" repeated Clarence, "Brice? Does he come from St. Louis?"

"Do you come from St. Louis, sir?"

"Yes. I have met Captain Colfax--"

"Colonel, sir."

"Colonel Colfax, before the war! And if he would like to go to St. Louis, I think I can have it arranged at once."

In silence they waited for Clarence's answer Stephen well knew what was passing in his mind, and guessed at his repugnance to accept a favor from a Yankee. He wondered whether there was in this case a special detestation. And so his mind was carried far to the northward to the memory of that day in the summer-house on the Meramee heights. Virginia had not loved her cousin then--of that Stephen was sure. But now,--now that the Vicksburg army was ringing with his praise, now that he was unfortunate--Stephen sighed. His comfort was that he would be the instrument.

The lady in her uneasiness smoothed the single sheet that covered the sick man. From afar came the sound of cheering, and it was this that seemed to rouse him. He faced them again, impatiently.

"I have reason to remember Mr. Brice," he said steadily. And then, with some vehemence, "What is he doing in Vicksburg?"

Stephen looked at Jennison, who winced.

"The city has surrendered," said that officer.

They counted on a burst of anger. Colfax only groaned.

"Then you can afford to be generous," he said, with a bitter laugh. "But you haven't whipped us yet, by a good deal. Jennison," he cried, "Jennison, why in hell did you give up?"

"Colfax," said Stephen, coming forward, "you're too sick a man to talk. I'll look up the General. It may be that I can have you sent North to-day."

"You can do as you please," said Clarence, coldly, "with a--prisoner."

The blood rushed to Stephen's face. Bowing to the lady, he strode out of the room. Colonel Jennison, running after him, caught him in the street.

"You're not offended, Brice?" he said. "He's sick--and God Almighty, he's proud--I reckon," he added with a touch of humility that went straight to Stephen's heart. "I reckon that some of us are too derved proud--But we ain't cold."

Stephen grasped his hand.

"Offended!" he said. "I admire the man. I'll go to the General directly. But just let me thank you. And I hope, Colonel, that we may meet again --as friends." "Hold on, seh," said Colonel Catesby Jennison; "we may as well drink to that."

Fortunately, as Stephen drew near the Court House, he caught sight of a group of officers seated on its steps, and among them he was quick to recognize General Sherman.

"Brice," said the General, returning his salute, "been celebrating this glorious Fourth with some of our Rebel friends?"

"Yes, sir," answered Stephen, "and I came to ask a favor for one of them." Seeing that the General's genial, interested expression did not change, he was emboldened to go on. "This is one of their colonels, sir. You may have heard of him. He is the man who floated down the river on a log and brought back two hundred thousand percussion caps--"

"Good Lord," interrupted the General, "I guess we all heard of him after that. What else has he done to endear himself?" he asked, with a smile.

"Well, General, he rowed across the river in a skiff the night we ran these batteries, and set fire to De Soto to make targets for their gunners."

"I'd like to see that man," said the General, in his eager way. "Where is he?"

"What I was going to tell you, sir. After he went through all this, he was hit by a piece of mortar shell, while sitting at his dinner. He's

rather far gone now, General, and they say he can't live unless he can be sent North. I--I know who he is in St. Louis. And I thought that as long as the officers are to be paroled I might get your permission to send him up to-day."

"What's his name?"

"Colfax, sir."

The General laughed. "I know the breed," said he, "I'll bet he didn't thank you."

"No, sir, he didn't."

"I like his grit," said the General, emphatically, "These young bloods are the backbone of this rebellion, Brice. They were made for war. They never did anything except horse-racing and cock-fighting. They ride like the devil, fight like the devil, but don't care a picayune for anything. Walker had some of 'em. Crittenden had some. And, good Lord, how they hate a Yankee! I know this Colfax, too. He's a cousin of that fine-looking girl Brinsmade spoke of. They say he's engaged to her. Be a pity to disappoint her--eh?"

"Yes, General."

"Why, Captain, I believe you would like to marry her yourself! Take my advice, sir, and don't try to tame any wildcats."

"I'm glad to do a favor for that young man," said the General, when Stephen had gone off with the slip of paper he had given him. "I like to do that kind of a favor for any officer, when I can. Did you notice how he flared up when I mentioned the girl?"

This is why Clarence Colfax found himself that evening on a hospital steamer of the Sanitary Commission, bound north for St. Louis.

CHAPTER XI

BELLE GARDE ONCE MORE

Supper at Bellegarde was not the simple meal it had been for a year past at Colonel Carvel's house in town. Mrs. Colfax was proud of her table, proud of her fried chickens and corn fritters and her desserts. How Virginia chafed at those suppers, and how she despised the guests whom her aunt was in the habit of inviting to some of them! And when none was present, she was forced to listen to Mrs. Colfax's prattle about the fashions, her tirades against the Yankees.

"I'm sure he must be dead," said that lady, one sultry evening in July. Her tone, however, was not one of conviction. A lazy wind from the river stirred the lawn of Virginia's gown. The girl, with her hand on the wicker back of the chair, was watching a storm gather to the eastward, across the Illinois prairie.

"I don't see why you say that, Aunt Lillian," she replied. "Bad news travels faster than good."

"And not a word from Comyn. It is cruel of him not to send us a line, telling us where his regiment is."

Virginia did not reply. She had long since learned that the wisdom of silence was the best for her aunt's unreasonableness. Certainly, if Clarence's letters could not pass the close lines of the Federal troops, news of her father's Texas regiment could not come from Red River.

"How was Judge Whipple to-day?" asked Mrs. Colfax presently.

"Very weak. He doesn't seem to improve much."

"I can't see why Mrs. Brice,--isn't that her name?--doesn't take him to her house. Yankee women are such prudes."

Virginia began to rock slowly, and her foot tapped the porch.

"Mrs. Brice has begged the Judge to come to her. But he says he has lived in those rooms, and that he will die there,--when the time comes."

"How you worship that woman, Virginia! You have become quite a Yankee yourself, I believe, spending whole days with her, nursing that old man."

"The Judge is an old friend of my father's; I think he would wish it," replied the girl, in a lifeless voice.

Her speech did not reveal all the pain and resentment she felt. She thought of the old man racked with pain and suffering in the heat, lying patient on his narrow bed, the only light of life remaining the presence of the two women. They came day by day, and often Margaret Brice had taken the place of the old negress who sat with him at night. Worship Margaret Brice! Yes, it was worship; it had been worship since the day she and her father had gone to the little whitewashed hospital. Providence had brought them together at the Judge's bedside. The marvellous quiet power of the older woman had laid hold of the girl in spite of all barriers.

Often when the Judge's pain was eased sufficiently for him to talk, he would speak of Stephen. The mother never spoke of her son, but a light would come into her eyes at this praise of him which thrilled Virginia to see. And when the good lady was gone, and the Judge had fallen into slumber, it would still haunt her.

Was it out of consideration for her that Mrs. Brice would turn the Judge from this topic which he seemed to love best? Virginia could not admit to herself that she resented this. She had heard Stephen's letters to the Judge. They came every week. Strong and manly they were, with plenty of praises for the Southern defenders of Vicksburg. Only yesterday Virginia had read one of these to Mr. Whipple, her face burning. Well that his face was turned to the window, and that Stephen's mother was not there!

"He says very little about himself," Mr. Whipple complained. "Had it not been for Brinsmade, we should never know that Sherman had his eye on him, and had promoted him. We should never have known of that exploit at Chickasaw Bluff. But what a glorious victory was Grant's capture of Vicksburg, on the Fourth of July! I guess we'll make short work of the Rebels now."

No, the Judge had not changed much, even in illness. He would never change. Virginia laid the letter down, and tears started to her eyes as she repressed a retort. It was not the first time this had happened. At every Union victory Mr. Whipple would loose his tongue. How strange that, with all his thought of others, he should fall short here!

One day, after unusual forbearance, Mrs. Brice had overtaken Virginia on the stairway. Well she knew the girl's nature, and how difficult she must have found repression. Margaret Brice had taken her hand.

"My dear," she had said, "you are a wonderful woman." That was all. But Virginia had driven back to Belle. garde with a strange elation in her heart.

Some things the Judge had forborne to mention, and for this Virginia was thankful. One was the piano. But she had overheard Shadrach telling old Nancy how Mrs. Brice had pleaded with him to move it, that he might have more room and air. He had been obdurate. And Colonel Carvel's name had never once passed his lips.

Many a night the girl had lain awake listening to the steamboats as they toiled against the river's current, while horror held her. Horror lest her father at that moment be in mortal agony amongst the heaps left by the battle's surges; heaps in which, like mounds of ashes, the fire was not yet dead. Fearful tales she had heard in the prison hospitals of wounded men lying for days in the Southern sun between the trenches at Vicksburg, or freezing amidst the snow and sleet at Donelson.

Was her bitterness against the North not just? What a life had been Colonel Carvel's! It had dawned brightly. One war had cost him his wife. Another, and he had lost his fortune, his home, his friends, all that was dear to him. And that daughter, whom he loved best in all the world, he was perchance to see no more.

Mrs. Colfax, yawning, had taken a book and gone to bed. Still Virginia sat on the porch, while the frogs sang of rain, and the lightning quivered across the eastern sky. She heard the crunch of wheels in the gravel.

A bar of light, peopled by moths, slanted out of the doorway and fell on a closed carriage. A gentleman slowly ascended the steps. Virginia recognized him as Mr. Brinsmade.

"Your cousin Clarence has come home, my dear," he said. "He was among the captured at Vicksburg, and is paroled by General Grant."

Virginia gave a little cry and started forward. But he held her hands.

"He has been wounded!"

"Yes," she exclaimed, "yes. Oh, tell me, Mr. Brinsmade, tell me--all--"

"No, he is not dead, but he is very low. Mr. Russell has been kind enough to come with me."

She hurried to call the servants. But they were all there in the light, in African postures of terror,--Alfred, and Sambo, and Mammy Easter, and Ned. They lifted the limp figure in gray, and carried it into the hall chamber, his eyes closed, his face waxen under a beard brown and shaggy.

Heavily, Virginia climbed the stairs to break the news to her aunt.

There is little need to dwell on the dark days which followed--Clarence hanging between life and death. That his life was saved was due to Virginia and to Mammy Easter, and in no particle to his mother. Mrs. Colfax flew in the face of all the known laws of nursing, until Virginia was driven to desperation, and held a council of war with Dr. Polk. Then her aunt grew jealous, talked of a conspiracy, and threatened to send for Dr. Brown--which Dr. Polk implored her to do. By spells she wept, when they quietly pushed her from the room and locked the door. She would creep in to him in the night during Mammy Easter's watches and talk him into a raging fever. But Virginia slept lightly and took the alarm. More than one scene these two had in the small hours, while Ned was riding post haste over the black road to town for the Doctor.

By the same trusty messenger did Virginia contrive to send a note to Mrs. Brice, begging her to explain her absence to Judge Whipple. By day or night Virginia did not leave Bellegarde. And once Dr. Polk, while walking in the garden, found the girl fast asleep on a bench, her sewing on her lap. Would that a master had painted his face as he looked down at her!

'Twas he who brought Virginia daily news of Judge Whipple. Bad news, alas! for he seemed to miss her greatly. He had become more querulous and exacting with patient Mrs. Brice, and inquired for her continually.

She would not go. But often, when he got into his buggy the Doctor found the seat filled with roses and fresh fruit. Well he knew where to carry them.

What Virginia's feelings were at this time no one will ever know. God had mercifully given her occupation, first with the Judge, and later, when she needed it more, with Clarence. It was she whom he recognized first of all, whose name was on his lips in his waking moments. With the petulance of returning reason, he pushed his mother away. Unless Virginia was at his bedside when he awoke, his fever rose. He put his hot hand into her cool one, and it rested there sometimes for hours. Then, and only then, did he seem contented.

The wonder was that her health did not fail. People who saw her during that fearful summer, fresh and with color in her cheeks, marvelled. Great-hearted Puss Russell, who came frequently to inquire, was quieted before her friend, and the frank and jesting tongue was silent in that presence. Anne Brinsmade came with her father and wondered. A miracle had changed Virginia. Her poise, her gentleness, her dignity, were the effects which people saw. Her force people felt. And this is why we cannot of ourselves add one cubit to our stature. It is God who changes, --who cleanses us of our levity with the fire of trial. Happy, thrice happy, those whom He chasteneth. And yet how many are there who could not bear the fire--who would cry out at the flame.

Little by little Clarence mended, until he came to sit out on the porch in the cool of the afternoon. Then he would watch for hours the tassels stirring over the green fields of corn and the river running beyond, while the two women sat by. At times, when Mrs. Colfax's headaches came on, and Virginia was alone with him, he would talk of the war; sometimes of their childhood, of the mad pranks they played here at Bellegarde, of their friends. Only when Virginia read to him the Northern account of the battles would he emerge from a calm sadness into excitement; and he clenched his fists and tried to rise when he heard of the capture of

Jackson and the fall of Port Hudson. Of love he spoke not a word, and now that he was better he ceased to hold her hand. But often when she looked up from her book, she would surprise his dark eyes fixed upon her, and a look in them of but one interpretation. She was troubled.

The Doctor came but every other day now, in the afternoon. It was his custom to sit for a while on the porch chatting cheerily with Virginia, his stout frame filling the rocking-chair. Dr. Polk's indulgence was gossip--though always of a harmless nature: how Mr. Cluyme always managed to squirm over to the side which was in favor, and how Maude Catherwood's love-letter to a certain dashing officer of the Confederate army had been captured and ruthlessly published in the hateful Democrat. It was the Doctor who gave Virginia news of the Judge, and sometimes he would mention Mrs. Brice. Then Clarence would raise his head; and once (she saw with trepidation) he had opened his lips to speak.

One day the Doctor came, and Virginia looked into his face and divined that he had something to tell her. He sat but a few moments, and when he arose to go he took her hand.

"I have a favor to beg of you, Jinny," he said, "Judge has lost his nurse. Do you think Clarence could spare you for a little while every day? I shouldn't ask it," Dr. Polk continued, somewhat hurriedly for him, "but the Judge cannot bear a stranger near him, and I am afraid to have him excited while in this condition."

"Mrs. Brice is ill?" she cried. And Clarence, watching, saw her color go.

"No," replied Dr. Polk, "but her son Stephen has come home from the army. He was transferred to Lauman's brigade, and then he was wounded." He jangled the keys in his pocket and continued "It seems that he had no business in the battle. Johnston in his retreat had driven animals into all the ponds and shot them, and in the hot weather the water was soon poisoned. Mr. Brice was scarcely well enough to stand when they made the charge, and he is now in a dreadful condition He is a fine fellow," added the Doctor, with a sigh, "General Sherman sent a special physician to the boat with him. He is--" Subconsciously the Doctor's arm sought Virginia's back, as though he felt her swaying. But he was looking at Clarence, who had jerked himself forward in his chair, his thin hands convulsively clutching at the arms of it. He did not appear to see Virginia.

"Stephen Brice, did you say?" he cried, "will he die?"

In his astonishment the Doctor passed his palm across his brow, and for a moment he did not answer. Virginia had taken a step from him, and was standing motionless, almost rigid, her eyes on his face.

"Die?" he said, repeating the word mechanically; "my God, I hope not. The danger is over, and he is resting easily. If he were not," he said quickly and forcibly, "I should not be here."

The Doctor's mare passed more than one fleet-footed trotter on the road. to town that day. And the Doctor's black servant heard his master utter the word "fool" twice, and with great emphasis.

For a long time Virginia stood on the end of the porch, until the heaving of the buggy harness died on the soft road, She felt Clarence gaze upon her before she turned to face him.

"Virginia!" He had called her so of late. "Yes, dear."

"Virginia, sit here a moment; I have something to tell you."

She came and took the chair beside him, her heart beating, her breast rising and falling. She looked into his eyes, and her own lashes fell before the hopelessness there. But he put out his fingers, wasted by illness, and she took them in her own.

He began slowly, as if every word cost him pain.

"Virginia, we were children together here. I cannot remember the time when I did not love you, when I did not think of you as my wife. All I did when we played together was to try to win your applause. That was my nature I could not help it. Do you remember the day I climbed out on the rotten branch of the big pear tree yonder to get you that pear--when I fell on the roof of Alfred's cabin? I did not feel the pain. It was because you kissed it and cried over me. You are crying now," he said tenderly. "Don't, Jinny. It isn't to make you sad that I am saying this."

"I have had a great deal of time to think lately, Jinny, I was not brought up seriously,--to be a man. I have been thinking of that day just before you were eighteen, when you rode out here. How well I remember it. It was a purple day. The grapes were purple, and a purple haze was over there across the river. You had been cruel to me. You were grown a woman then, and I was still nothing but a boy. Do you remember the doe coming out of the forest, and how she ran screaming when I tried to kiss you? You told me I was good for nothing. Please don't interrupt me. It was true what you said, that I was wild and utterly useless, I had never served or pleased any but myself,--and you. I had never studied or worked, You were right when you told me I must learn something,--do something,--become of some account in the world. I am just as useless to day."

"Clarence, after what you have done for the South?"

He smiled with peculiar bitterness.

"What have I done for her?" he added. "Crossed the river and burned houses. I could not build them again. Floated down the river on a log after a few percussion caps. That did not save Vicksburg."

"And how many had the courage to do that?" she exclaimed.

"Pooh," he said, "courage! the whole South has it, Courage! If I did not have that, I would send Sambo to my father's room for his ebony box and blow my brains out. No, Jinny, I am nothing but a soldier of fortune. I never possessed any quality but a wild spirit for adventure, to shirk work. I wanted to go with Walker, you remember. I wanted to go to Kansas. I wanted to distinguish myself," he added with a gesture. "But that is all gone now, Jinny. I wanted to distinguish myself for you. Now I see how an earnest life might have won you. No, I have not done yet."

She raised her head, frightened, and looked at him searchingly.

"One day," he said, "one day a good many years ago you and I and Uncle Comyn were walking along Market Street in front of Judge Whipple's office, and a slave auction was going on. A girl was being sold on whom you had set your heart. There was some one in the crowd, a Yankee, who

bid her in and set her free. Do you remember him?"

He saw her profile, her lips parted, her look far away, She inclined her head.

"Yes," said her cousin, "so do I remember him. He has crossed my path many times since, Virginia. And mark what I say--it was he whom you had in mind on that birthday when you implored me to make something of myself, It was Stephen Brice."

Her eyes flashed upon him quickly.

"Oh, how dare you?" she cried.

"I dare anything, Virginia," he answered quietly. "I am not blaming you. And I am sure that you did not realize that he was the ideal which you had in mind."

The impression of him has never left it. Fate is in it. Again, that night at the Brinsmades', when we were in fancy dress, I felt that I had lost you when I got back. He had been there when I was away, and gone again. And--and--you never told me."

"It was a horrible mistake, Max," she faltered. "I was waiting for you down the road, and stopped his horse instead. It--it was nothing--"

"It was fate, Jinny. In that half-hour I lost you. How I hated that man," he cried, "how I hated him?"

"Hated!" exclaimed Virginia, involuntarily. "Oh, no!"

"Yes," he said, "hated! I would have killed him if I could. But now--"

"But now?"

"Now he has saved my life. I have not--I could not tell you before: He came into the place where I was lying in Vicksburg, and they told him that my only chance was to come North, I turned my back upon him, insulted him. Yet he went to Sherman and had me brought home--to you, Virginia. If he loves you,--and I have long suspected that he does--"

"Oh, no," she cried, hiding her face "No."

"I know he loves you, Jinny," her cousin continued calmly, inexorably. "And you know that he does. You must feel that he does. It was a brave thing to do, and a generous. He knew that you were engaged to me. He thought that he was saving me for you. He was giving up the hope of marrying you himself."

Virginia sprang to her feet. Unless you had seen her then, you had never known the woman in her glory.

"Marry a Yankee!" she cried. "Clarence Colfax, have you known and loved me all my life that you might accuse me of this? Never, never, never!" Transformed, he looked incredulous admiration.

"Jinny, do you mean it?" he cried.

In answer she bent down with all that gentleness and grace that was hers,

and pressed her lips to his forehead. Long after she had disappeared in the door he sat staring after her.

But later, when Mammy Easter went to call her mistress for supper, she found her with her face buried in the pillows.

CHAPTER X

IN JUDGE WHIPPLE'S OFFICE

After this Virginia went to the Judge's bedside every day, in the morning, when Clarence took his sleep. She read his newspapers to him when he was well enough. She read the detested Missouri Democrat, which I think was the greatest trial Virginia ever had to put up with. To have her beloved South abused, to have her heroes ridiculed, was more than she could bear. Once, when the Judge was perceptibly better, she flung the paper out of the window, and left the room. He called her back penitently.

"My dear," he said, smiling admiration, "forgive an old bear. A selfish old bear, Jinny; my only excuse is my love for the Union. When you are not here, I lie in agony, lest she has suffered some mortal blow unknown to me, Jinny. And if God sees fit to spare our great country, the day will come when you will go down on your knees and thank Him for the inheritance which He saved for your children. You are a good woman, my dear, and a strong one. I have hoped that you will see the right. That you will marry a great citizen, one unwavering in his service and devotion to our Republic." The Judge's voice trembled with earnestness as he spoke. And the gray eyes under the shaggy brows were alight with the sacred fire of his life's purpose. Undaunted as her spirit was, she could not answer him then.

Once, only once, he said to her: "Virginia, I loved your father better than any man I ever knew. Please God I may see him again before I die."

He never spoke of the piano. But sometimes at twilight his eyes would rest on the black cloth that hid it.

Virginia herself never touched that cloth to her it seemed the shroud upon a life of happiness that was dead and gone.

Virginia had not been with Judge Whipple during the critical week after Stephen was brought home. But Anne had told her that his anxiety was a pitiful thing to see, and that it had left him perceptibly weaker. Certain it was that he was failing fast. So fast that on some days Virginia, watching him, would send Ned or Shadrach in hot haste for Dr. Polk.

At noon Anne would relieve Virginia,--Anne or her mother,--and frequently Mr. Brinsmade would come likewise. For it is those who have the most to do who find the most time for charitable deeds. As the hour for their coming drew near, the Judge would be seeking the clock, and scarce did Anne's figure appear in the doorway before the question had arisen to his lips--"And how is my young Captain to-day?"

That is what he called him,--"My young Captain." Virginia's choice of her

cousin, and her devotion to him, while seemingly natural enough, had drawn many a sigh from Anne. She thought it strange that Virginia herself had never once asked her about Stephen's condition and she spoke of this one day to the Judge with as much warmth as she was capable of.

"Jinny's heart is like steel where a Yankee is concerned. If her best friend were a Yankee--"

Judge Whipple checked her, smiling.

"She has been very good to one Yankee I know of," he said. "And as for Mrs. Brice, I believe she worships her."

"But when I said that Stephen was much better to-day, she swept out of the room as if she did not care whether he lived or died."

"Well, Anne," the Judge had answered, "you women are a puzzle to me. I guess you don't understand yourselves," he added.

That was a strange month in the life of Clarence Colfax,--the last of his recovery, while he was waiting for the news of his exchange. Bellegarde was never more beautiful, for Mrs. Colfax had no whim of letting the place run down because a great war was in progress. Though devoted to the South, she did not consecrate her fortune to it. Clarence gave as much as he could.

Whole afternoons Virginia and he would sit in the shaded arbor seat; or at the cool of the day descend to the bench on the lower tier of the summer garden, to steep, as it were, in the blended perfumes of the roses and the mignonettes and the pinks. He was soberer than of old. Often through the night he pondered on the change in her. She, too, was grave. But he was troubled to analyze her gravity, her dignity. Was this merely strength of character, the natural result of the trials through which she had passed, the habit acquired of being the Helper and comforter instead of the helped and comforted? Long years afterward the brightly colored portrait of her remained in his eye,--the simple linen gown of pink or white, the brown hair shining in the sunlight, the graceful poise of the head. And the background of flowers--flowers everywhere, far from the field of war.

Sometimes, when she brought his breakfast on a tray in the morning, there was laughter in her eyes. In the days gone by they had been all laughter.

They were engaged. She was to be his wife. He said it over to himself many, many times in the day. He would sit for a space, feasting his eyes upon her until she lifted her look to his, and the rich color flooded her face. He was not a lover to sit quietly by, was Clarence. And yet, as the winged days flew on, that is what he did, It was not that she did not respond to his advances, he did not make them. Nor could he have told why. Was it the chivalry inherited from a long life of Colfaxes who were gentlemen? Not wholly. Something of awe had crept into his feeling for her.

As the month wore on, and the time drew near for him to go back to the war, a state that was not quite estrangement, and yet something very like it, set in. Poor Clarence. Doubts bothered him, and he dared not give them voice. By night he would plan his speeches,--impassioned, imploring. To see her in her marvellous severity was to strike him dumb. Horrible thought! Whether she loved him, whether she did not love him, she would

not give him up. Through the long years of their lives together, he would never know. He was not a weak man now, was Clarence Colfax. He was merely a man possessed of a devil, enchained by the power of self-repression come upon her whom he loved.

And day by day that power seemed to grow more intense,--invulnerable. Among her friends and in the little household it had raised Virginia to heights which she herself did not seem to realize. She was become the mistress of Bellegarde. Mrs. Colfax was under its sway, and doubly miserable because Clarence would listen to her tirades no more.

"When are you to be married?" she had ventured to ask him once. Nor had she taken pains to hide the sarcasm in her voice.

His answer, bringing with it her remembrance of her husband at certain times when it was not safe to question him, had silenced her. Addison Colfax had not been a quiet man. When he was quiet he was dangerous.

"Whenever Virginia is ready, mother," he had replied. Whenever Virginia was ready! He knew in his heart that if he were to ask her permission to send for Dr. Posthelwaite to-morrow that she would say yes. Tomorrow came,--and with it a great envelope, an official, answer to Clarence's report that he was fit for duty once more. He had been exchanged. He was to proceed to Cairo, there to await the arrival of the transport Indianapolis, which was to carry five hundred officers and men from Sandusky Prison, who were going back to fight once more for the Confederacy. O that they might have seen the North, all those brave men who made that sacrifice. That they might have realized the numbers and the resources and the wealth arrayed against them!

It was a cool day for September, a perfect day, an auspicious day, and yet it went the way of the others before it. This was the very fulness of the year, the earth giving out the sweetness of her maturity, the corn in martial ranks, with golden plumes nodding. The forest still in its glory of green. They walked in silence the familiar paths, and Alfred, clipping the late roses for the supper table, shook his white head as they passed him. The sun, who had begun to hurry on his southward journey, went to bed at six. The few clothes Clarence was to take with him had been packed by Virginia in his bag, and the two were standing in the twilight on the steps of the house, when Ned came around the corner. He called his young mistress by name, but she did not hear him. He called again.

"Miss Jinny!"

She started as from a sleep, and paused.

"Yes, Mr. Johnson," said she, and smiled. He wore that air of mystery so dear to darkeys.

"Gemmen to see you, Miss Jinny."

"A gentleman!" she said in surprise. "Where?"

The negro pointed to the lilac shrubbery.

"Thar!"

"What's all this nonsense, Ned?" said Clarence, sharply: "If a man is there, bring him here at once."

"Reckon he won't come, Marse Clarence." said Ned, "He fearful skeered ob de light ob day. He got suthin very pertickler fo' Miss Jinny."

"Do you know him?" Clarence demanded.

"No sah--yessah--leastwise I'be seed 'um. Name's Robimson."

The word was hardly out of his mouth before Virginia had leaped down the four feet from the porch to the flower-bed and was running across the lawn toward the shrubbery. Parting the bushes after her, Clarence found his cousin confronting a large man, whom he recognized as the carrier who brought messages from the South.

"What's the matter, Jinny?" he demanded.

"Pa has got through the lines," she said breathlessly. "He--he came up to see me. Where is he, Robimson?"

"He went to Judge Whipple's rooms, ma'am. They say the Judge is dying. I reckoned you knew it, Miss Jinny," Robimson added contritely.

"Clarence," she said, "I must go at once."

"I will go with you," he said; "you cannot go alone." In a twinkling Ned and Sambo had the swift pair of horses harnessed, and the light carriage was flying over the soft clay road toward the city. As they passed Mr. Brinsmade's place, the moon hung like a great round lantern under the spreading trees about the house. Clarence caught a glimpse of his cousin's face in the light. She was leaning forward, her gaze fixed intently on the stone posts which stood like monuments between the bushes at the entrance. Then she drew back again into the dark corner of the barouche. She was startled by a sharp challenge, and the carriage stopped. Looking out, she saw the provost's guard like black card figures on the road, and Ned fumbling for his pass.

On they drove into the city streets until the dark bulk of the Court House loomed in front of them, and Ned drew rein at the little stairway which led to the Judge's rooms. Virginia, leaping out of the carriage, flew up the steps and into the outer office, and landed in the Colonel's arms.

"Jinny!"

"Oh, Pa!" she cried. "Why do you risk your life in this way? If the Yankees catch you--"

"They won't catch me, honey," he answered, kissing her. Then he held her out at arm's length and gazed earnestly into her face. Trembling, she searched his own. "Pa, how old you look!"

"I'm not precisely young, my dear," he said, smiling. His hair was nearly white, and his face scared. But he was a fine erect figure of a man, despite the shabby clothes he wore, and the mud-bespattered boots.

"Pa," she whispered, "it was foolhardy to come here. Why did you come to St. Louis at all?"

"I came to see you, Jinny, I reckon. And when I got home to-night and

heard Silas was dying, I just couldn't resist. He's the oldest friend I've got in St. Louis, honey and now--now--"

"Pa, you've been in battle?"

"Yes," he said.

"And you weren't hurt; I thank God for that," she whispered. After a while: "Is Uncle Silas dying?"

"Yes, Jinny; Dr. Polk is in there now, and says that he can't last through the night. Silas has been asking for you, honey, over and over. He says you were very good to him,--that you and Mrs. Brice gave up everything to nurse him."

"She did," Virginia faltered. "She was here night and day until her son came home. She is a noble woman--"

"Her son?" repeated the Colonel. "Stephen Brice? Silas has done nothing the last half-hour but call his name. He says he must see the boy before he dies. Polk says he is not strong enough to come."

"Oh, no, he is not strong enough," cried Virginia. The Colonel looked down at her queerly. "Where is Clarence?" he asked.

She had not thought of Clarence. She turned hurriedly, glanced around the room, and then peered down the dark stairway.

"Why, he came in with me. I wonder why he did not follow me up?"

"Virginia."

"Yes, Pa."

"Virginia, are you happy?"

"Why, yes, Pa."

"Are you going to marry Clarence?" he asked.

"I have promised," she said simply.

Then after a long pause, seeing her father said nothing, she added, "Perhaps he was waiting for you to see me alone. I will go down to see if he is in the carriage."

The Colonel started with her, but she pulled him back in alarm.

"You will be seen, Pa," she cried. "How can you be so reckless?"

He stayed at the top of the passage, holding open the door that she might have light. When she reached the sidewalk, there was Ned standing beside the horses, and the carriage empty.

"Ned!"

"Yass'm, Miss Jinny."

"Where's Mr. Clarence?"

"He done gone, Miss Tinny."

"Gone?"

"Yass'm. Fust I seed was a man plump out'n Willums's, Miss Jinny. He was a-gwine shufflin' up de street when Marse Clarence put out after him, pos' has'e. Den he run."

She stood for a moment on the pavement in thought, and paused on the stairs again, wondering whether it were best to tell her father. Perhaps Clarence had seen--she caught her breath at the thought and pushed open the door.

"Oh, Pa, do you think you are safe here?" she cried. "Why, yes, honey, I reckon so," he answered. "Where's Clarence?"

"Ned says he ran after a man who was hiding in an entrance. Pa, I am afraid they are watching the place."

"I don't think so, Jinny. I came here with Polk, in his buggy, after dark."

Virginia, listening, heard footsteps on the stairs, and seized her father's sleeve.

"Think of the risk you are running, Pa," she whispered. She would have dragged him to the closet. But it was too late. The door opened, and Mr. Brinsmade entered, and with him a lady veiled.

At sight of Mr. Carvel Mr. Brinsmade started back in surprise. How long he stared at his old friend Virginia could not say. It seemed to her an eternity. But Mrs. Brice has often told since how straight the Colonel stood, his fine head thrown back, as he returned the glance. Then Mr. Brinsmade came forward, with his hand outstretched.

"Comyn," said he, his voice breaking a little, "I have known you these many years as a man of unstained honor. You are safe with me. I ask no questions. God will judge whether I have done my duty."

Mr. Carvel took his friend's hand. "Thank you, Calvin," he said. "I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that I came into this city for no other reason than to see my daughter. And hearing that my old friend was dying, I could not resist the temptation, sir--"

Mr. Brinsmade finished for him. And his voice shook.

"To come to his bedside. How many men do you think would risk their lives so, Mrs. Brice?"

"Not many, indeed, Mr. Brinsmade," she answered. "Thank God he will now die happy. I know it has been much on his mind."

The Colonel bowed over her hand.

"And in his name, madam,--in the name of my oldest and best friend,--I thank you for what you have done for him. I trust that you will allow me to add that I have learned from my daughter to respect and admire you. I hope that your son is doing well."

"He is, thank you, Colonel Carvel. If he but knew that the Judge were dying, I could not have kept him at home. Dr. Polk says that he must not leave the house, or undergo any excitement."

Just then the door of the inner room opened, and Dr. Polk came out. He bowed gravely to Mrs. Brice and Mr. Brinsmade, and he patted Virginia.

"The Judge is still asleep," he said gently. "And--he may not wake up in this world."

Silently, sadly, they went together into that little room where so much of Judge Whipple's life had been spent. How little it was! And how completely they filled it,--these five people and the big Rothfield covered with the black cloth. Virginia pressed her father's arm as they leaned against it, and brushed her eyes. The Doctor turned the wick of the night-lamp.

What was that upon the sleeper's face from which they drew back? A smile? Yes, and a light. The divine light which is shed upon those who have lived for others, who have denied themselves the lusts of the flesh, For a long space, perhaps an hour, they stayed, silent save for a low word now and again from the Doctor as he felt the Judge's heart. Tableaux from the past floated before Virginia's eyes. Of the old days, of the happy days in Locust Street, of the Judge quarrelling with her father, and she and Captain Lige smiling nearby. And she remembered how sometimes when the controversy was finished the Judge would rub his nose and say:

"It's my turn now, Lige."

Whereupon the Captain would open the piano, and she would play the hymn that he liked best. It was "Lead, Kindly Light."

What was it in Silas Whipple's nature that courted the pain of memories? What pleasure could it have been all through his illness to look upon this silent and cruel reminder of days gone by forever? She had heard that Stephen Brice had been with the Judge when he had bid it in. She wondered that he had allowed it, for they said that he was the only one who had ever been known to break the Judge's will. Virginia's eyes rested on Margaret Brice, who was seated at the head of the bed, smoothing the pillows. The strength of Stephen's features were in hers, but not the ruggedness. Her features were large, indeed, yet stanch and softened. The widow, as if feeling Virginia's look upon her, glanced up from the Judge's face and smiled at her. The girl colored with pleasure, and again at the thought which she had had of the likeness between mother and son.

Still the Judge slept on, while they watched. And at length the thought of Clarence crossed Virginia's mind.

Why had he not returned? Perhaps he was in the office without. Whispering to her father, she stole out on tiptoe. The office was empty. Descending to the street, she was unable to gain any news of Clarence from Ned, who was becoming alarmed likewise.

Perplexed and troubled, she climbed the stairs again. No sound came from the Judge's room. Perhaps Clarence would be back at any moment. Perhaps her father was in danger. She sat down to think,--her elbows on the desk in front of her, her chin in her hand, her eyes at the level of a line of

books which stood on end.--Chitty's Pleadings, Blackstone, Greenleaf on Evidence. Absently; as a person whose mind is in trouble, she reached out and took one of them down and opened it. Across the flyleaf, in a high and bold hand, was written the name, Stephen Atterbury Brice.

It was his desk! She was sitting in his chair!

She dropped the book, and, rising abruptly, crossed quickly to the other side of the room. Then she turned, hesitatingly, and went back. This was his desk--his chair, in which he had worked so faithfully for the man who lay dying beyond the door. For him whom they all loved--whose last hours they were were to soothe. Wars and schisms may part our bodies, but stronger ties unite our souls. Through Silas Whipple, through his mother, Virginia knew that she was woven of one piece with Stephen Brice. In a thousand ways she was reminded, lest she drive it from her belief. She might marry another, and that would not matter.

She sank again into his chair, and gave herself over to the thoughts crowding in her heart. How the threads of his life ran next to hers, and crossed and recrossed them. The slave auction, her dance with him, the Fair, the meeting at Mr. Brinsmade's gate,--she knew them all. Her love and admiration for his mother. Her dreams of him--for she did dream of him. And now he had saved Clarence's life that she might marry her cousin. Was it true that she would marry Clarence? That seemed to her only a dream. It had never seemed real. Again she glanced at the signature in the book, as if fascinated by the very strength of it. She turned over a few pages of the book, "Supposing the defendant's counsel essays to prove by means of--" that was his writing again, a marginal, note. There were marginal notes on every page--even the last was covered with them, And then at the end, "First reading, February, 1858. Second reading, July, 1858. Bought with some of money obtained by first article for M. D." That capacity for work, incomparable gift, was what she had always coveted the most. Again she rested her elbows on the desk and her chin on her hands, and sighed unconsciously.

She had not heard the step on the stair. She had not seen the door open. She did not know that any one was in the room until she heard his voice, and then she thought that she was dreaming.

"Miss Carvel!"

"Yes?" Her head did not move. He took a step toward her.

"Miss Carvel!"

Slowly she raised her face to his, unbelief and wonder in her eyes, --unbelief and wonder and fright. No; it could not be he. But when she met the quality of his look, the grave tenderness of it, she trembled, and her own rendered her own to the page where his handwriting quivered and became a blur.

He never knew the effort it cost her to rise and confront him. She herself had not measured or fathomed the power which his very person exhaled. It seemed to have come upon him suddenly. He needed not to have spoken for her to have felt that. What it was she could not tell. She knew alone that it was high irresistible, and she grasped the back of the chair as though material support might sustain her.

"Is he--dead?"

She was breathing hard.

"No," she said. "Not--not yet, They are waiting for the end."

"And you?" he asked in grave surprise, glancing at the door of the Judge's room.

Then she remembered Clarence.

"I am waiting for my cousin," she said.

Even as she spoke she was with this man again at the Brinsmade gate. Those had been her very words! Intuition told her that he, too, was thinking of that time. Now he had found her at his desk, and, as if that were not humiliation enough, with one of his books taken down and laid open at his signature. Suffused, she groped for words to carry her on.

"I am waiting for Clarence, Mr. Brice. He was here, and is gone somewhere."

He did not seem to take account of the speech. And his silence--goad to indiscretion--pressed her to add:-- "You saved him, Mr. Brice. I--we all--thank you so much. And that is not all I want to say. It is a poor enough acknowledgment of what you did,--for we have not always treated you well." Her voice faltered almost to faintness, as he raised his hand in pained protest. But she continued: "I shall regard it as a debt I can never repay. It is not likely that in my life to come I can ever help you, but I shall pray for that opportunity."

He interrupted her.

"I did nothing, Miss Carvel, nothing that the most unfeeling man in our army would not do. Nothing that I would not have done for the merest stranger."

"You saved him for me," she said.

O fateful words that spoke of themselves! She turned away from him for very shame, and yet she heard him saying:-- "Yes, I saved him for you."

His voice was in the very note of the sadness which has the strength to suffer, to put aside the thought of self. A note to which her soul responded with anguish when she turned to him with the natural cry of woman.

"Oh, you ought not to have come here to-night. Why did you come? The Doctor forbade it. The consequences may kill you."

"It does not matter much," he answered. "The Judge was dying."

"How did you know?"

"I guessed it,--because my mother had left me."

"Oh, you ought not to have come!" she said again.

"The Judge has been my benefactor," he answered quietly. "I could walk, and it was my duty to come."

"You did not walk!" she gasped.

He smiled, "I had no carriage," he said.

With the instinct of her sex she seized the chair and placed it under him. "You must sit down at once," she cried.

"But I am not tired," he replied.

"Oh, you must sit down, you must, Captain Brice." He started at the title, which came so prettily from her lips, "Won't you please!" she said pleadingly.

He sat down. And, as the sun peeps out of a troubled sky, she smiled.

"It is your chair," she said.

He glanced at the book, and the bit of sky was crimson. But still he said nothing.

"It is your book," she stammered. "I did not know that it was yours when I took it down. I--I was looking at it while I was waiting for Clarence."

"It is dry reading," he remarked, which was not what he wished to say.

"And yet--"

"Yes?"

"And yet you have read it twice." The confession had slipped to her lips.

She was sitting on the edge of his desk, looking down at him. Still he did not look at her. All the will that was left him averted his head. And the seal of honor was upon his speech. And he wondered if man were ever more tempted.

Then the evil spread its wings, and soared away into the night. And the moment was past. Peace seemed to come upon them both, quieting the tumult in their hearts, and giving them back their reason. Respect like wise came to the girl,--respect that was akin to awe. It was he who spoke first.

"My mother has me how faithfully you nursed the Judge, Miss Carvel. It was a very noble thing to do."

"Not noble at all," she replied hastily, "your mother did the most of it, And he is an old friend of my father--"

"It was none the less noble," said Stephen, warmly, "And he quarrelled with Colonel Carvel."

"My father quarrelled with him," she corrected. "It was well that I should make some atonement. And yet mine was no atonement, I love Judge Whipple. It was a--a privilege to see your mother every day--oh, how he would talk of you! I think he loves you better than any one on this earth."

"Tell me about him," said Stephen, gently.

Virginia told him, and into the narrative she threw the whole of her pent-up self. How patient the Judge had been, and the joy he had derived from Stephen's letters. "You were very good to write to him so often," she said. It seemed like a dream to Stephen, like one of the many dreams of her, the mystery of which was of the inner life beyond our ken. He could not recall a time when she had not been rebellious, antagonistic. And now--as he listened to her voice, with its exquisite low tones and modulations, as he sat there in this sacred intimacy, perchance to be the last in his life, he became dazed. His eyes, softened, with supreme eloquence cried out that she, was his, forever and forever. The magnetic force which God uses to tie the worlds together was pulling him to her. And yet the Puritan resisted.

Then the door swung open, and Clarence Colfax, out of breath, ran into the room. He stopped short when he saw them, his hand fell to his sides, and his words died on his lips. Virginia did not stir.

It was Stephen who rose to meet him, and with her eyes the girl followed his motions. The broad and loosely built frame of the Northerner, his shoulders slightly stooping, contrasted with Clarence's slighter figure, erect, compact, springy. The Southerner's eye, for that moment, was flint struck with the spark from the steel. Stephen's face, thinned by illness, was grave. The eyes kindly, yet penetrating. For an instant they stood thus regarding each other, neither offering a hand. It was Stephen who spoke first, and if there was a trace of emotion in his voice, one who was listening intently failed to mark it.

"I am glad to see that you have recovered, Colonel Colfax," he said.

"I should indeed be without gratitude if I did not thank Captain Brice for my life," answered Clarence. Virginia flushed. She had detected the undue accent on her cousin's last words, and she glanced apprehensively at Stephen. His forceful reply surprised them both.

"Miss Carvel has already thanked me sufficiently, sir," he said. "I am happy to have been able to have done you a good turn, and at the same time to have served her so well. It was she who saved your life. It is to her your thanks are chiefly due. I believe that I am not going too far, Colonel Colfax," he added, "when I congratulate you both."

Before her cousin could recover, Virginia slid down from the desk and had come between them. How her eyes shone and her lip trembled as she gazed at him, Stephen has never forgotten. What a woman she was as she took her cousin's arm and made him a curtsy.

"What you have done may seem a light thing to you, Captain Brice," she said. "That is apt to be the way with those who have big hearts. You have put upon Colonel Colfax, and upon me, a life's obligation."

When she began to speak, Clarence raised his head. As he glanced, incredulous, from her to Stephen, his look gradually softened, and when she had finished, his manner had become again frank, boyish, impetuous--nay, penitent. He seized Stephen's hand.

"Forgive me, Brice," he cried. "Forgive me. I should have known better. I--I did you an injustice, and you, Virginia. I was a fool--a scoundrel." Stephen shook his head.

"No, you were neither," he said. Then upon his face came the smile of one who has the strength to renounce, all that is dearest to him--that smile of the unselfish, sweetest of all. It brought tears to Virginia. She was to see it once again, upon the features of one who bore a cross, --Abraham Lincoln. Clarence looked, and then he turned away toward the door to the stairway, as one who walks blindly, in a sorrow.

His hand was on the knob when Virginia seemed to awake. She flew after him:

"Wait!" she whispered.

Then she raised her eyes, slowly, to Stephen, who was standing motionless beside his chair.

"Captain Brice!"

"Yes," he answered.

"My father is in the Judge's room," she said.

"Your father!" he exclaimed. "I thought--"

"That he was an officer in the Confederate Army. So he is." Her head went up as she spoke.

Stephen stared at her, troubled. Suddenly her manner, changed. She took a step toward him, appealingly.

"Oh, he is not a spy," she cried. "He has given Mr Brinsmade his word that he came here for no other purpose than to see me. Then he heard that the Judge was dying--"

"He has given his word to Mr. Brinsmade?"

"Yes."

"Then," said Stephen, "what Mr. Brinsmade sanctions is not for me to question."

She gave him yet another look, a fleeting one which he did not see. Then she softly opened the door and passed into the room of the dying man. Stephen followed her. As for Clarence, he stood for a space staring after them. Then he went noiselessly down the stairs into the street.

CHAPTER XI

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

When the Judge opened his eyes for the last time in this world, they fell first upon the face of his old friend, Colonel Carvel. Twice he tried to speak his name, and twice he failed. The third time he said it faintly.

"Comyn!"

"Yes, Silas."

"Comyn, what are you doing here?"

"I reckon I came to see you, Silas," answered the Colonel.

"To see me die," said the Judge, grimly.

Colonel Carvel's face twitched, and the silence in that little room seemed to throb.

"Comyn," said the Judge again, "I heard that you had gone South to fight against your country. I see you here. Can it be that you have at last returned in your allegiances to the flag for which your forefathers died?"

Poor Colonel Carvel

"I am still of the same mind, Silas," he said.

The Judge turned his face away, his thin lips moving as in prayer. But they knew that he was not praying, "Silas," said Mr. Carvel, "we were friends for twenty years. Let us be friends again, before--"

"Before I die," the Judge interrupted, "I am ready to die. Yes, I am ready. I have had a hard life, Comyn, and few friends. It was my fault. I--I did not know how to make them. Yet no man ever valued those few more than! But," he cried, the stern fire unquenched to the last, "I would that God had spared me to see this Rebellion stamped out. For it will be stamped out." To those watching, his eyes seemed fixed on a distant point, and the light of prophecy was in them. "I would that God had spared me to see this Union supreme once more. Yes, it will be supreme. A high destiny is reserved for this nation--! I think the highest of all on this earth." Amid profound silence he leaned back on the pillows from which he had risen, his breath coming fast. None dared look at the neighbor beside them.

It was Stephen's mother who spoke. "Would you not like to see a clergyman, Judge?" she asked.

The look on his face softened as he turned to her.

"No, madam," he answered; "you are clergyman enough for me. You are near enough to God--there is no one in this room who is not worthy to stand in the presence of death. Yet I wish that a clergyman were here, that he might listen to one thing I have to say. When I was a boy I worked my way down the river to New York, to see the city. I met a bishop there. He said to me, 'Sit down, my son, I want to talk to you. I know your father in Albany. You are Senator Whipple's son.' I said to him, 'No, sir, I am not Senator Whipple's son. I am no relation of his.' If the bishop had wished to talk to me after that, Mrs. Brice, he might have made my life a little easier--a little sweeter. I know that they are not all like that. But it was by just such things that I was embittered when I was a boy." He stopped, and when he spoke again, it was more slowly, more gently, than any of them had heard him speak in all his life before. "I wish that some of the blessings which I am leaving now had come to me then--when I was a boy. I might have done my little share in making the world a brighter place to live in, as all of you have done. Yes, as all of you are now doing for me. I am leaving the world with a better opinion of it than I ever held in life. God hid the sun from me when I was a little

child. Margaret Brice," he said, "if I had had such a mother as you, I would have been softened then. I thank God that He sent you when He did."

The widow bowed her head, and a tear fell upon his pillow.

"I have done nothing," she murmured, "nothing."

"So shall they answer at the last whom He has chosen," said the Judge. "I was sick, and ye visited me. He has promised to remember those who do that. Hold up your head, my daughter. God has been good to you. He has given you a son whom all men may look in the face, of whom you need never be ashamed. Stephen," said the Judge, "come here."

Stephen made his way to the bedside, but because of the moisture in his eyes he saw but dimly the gaunt face. And yet he shrank back in awe at the change in it. So must all of the martyrs have looked when the fire of the faggots licked their feet. So must John Bunyan have stared through his prison bars at the sky.

"Stephen," he said, "you have been faithful in a few things. So shall you be made ruler over many things. The little I have I leave to you, and the chief of this is an untarnished name. I know that you will be true to it because I have tried your strength. Listen carefully to what I have to say, for I have thought over it long. In the days gone by our fathers worked for the good of the people, and they had no thought of gain. A time is coming when we shall need that blood and that bone in this Republic. Wealth not yet dreamed of will flow out of this land, and the waters of it will rot all save the pure, and corrupt all save the incorruptible. Half-tried men wilt go down before that flood. You and those like you will remember how your fathers governed,--strongly, sternly, justly. It was so that they governed themselves.

"Be vigilant. Serve your city, serve your state, but above all serve your country."

He paused to catch his breath, which was coming painfully now, and reached out his bony hand to seek Stephen's. "I was harsh with you at first, my son," he went on. "I wished to try you. And when I had tried you I wished your mind to open, to keep pace with the growth of this nation. I sent you to see Abraham Lincoln that you might be born again --in the West. You were born again. I saw it when you came back--I saw it in your face. O God," he cried, with sudden eloquence. "I would that his hands--Abraham Lincoln's hands--might be laid upon all who complain and cavil and criticise, and think of the little things in life: I would that his spirit might possess their spirit!"

He stopped again. They marvelled and were awed, for never in all his days had such speech broken from this man. "Good-by, Stephen," he said, when they thought he was not to speak again. "Hold the image of Abraham Lincoln in front of you. Never forget him. You--you are a man after his own heart--and--and mine."

The last word was scarcely audible. They started for ward, for his eyes were closed. But presently he stirred again, and opened them.

"Brinsmade," he said, "Brinsmade, take care of my orphan girls. Send Shadrach here."

The negro came forth, shuffling and sobbing, from the doorway.

"You ain't gwine away, Marse Judge?"

"Yes, Shadrach, good-by. You have served me well, I have left you provided for."

Shadrach kissed the hand of whose secret charity he knew so much. Then the Judge withdrew it, and motioned to him to rise. He called his oldest friend by name. And Colonel Carvel came from the corner where he had been listening, with his face drawn.

"Good-by, Comyn. You were my friend when there was none other. You were true to me when the hand of every man was against me. You--you have risked your life to come to me here, May God spare it for Virginia."

At the sound of her name, the girl started. She came and bent over him. And when she kissed him on the forehead, he trembled.

"Uncle Silas!" she faltered.

Weakly he reached up and put his hands on her shoulders. He whispered in her ear. The tears came and lay wet upon her lashes as she undid the button at his throat.

There, on a piece of cotton twine, hung a little key, She took it off, but still his hands held her.

"I have saved it for you, my dear," he said. "God bless you--" why did his eyes seek Stephen's?--"and make your life happy. Virginia--will you play my hymn--once more--once more?"

They lifted the night lamp from the piano, and the medicine. It was Stephen who stripped it of the black cloth it had worn, who stood by Virginia ready to lift the lid when she had turned the lock. The girl's exaltation gave a trembling touch divine to the well-remembered chords, and those who heard were lifted, lifted far above and beyond the power of earthly spell.

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet! I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

A sigh shook Silas Whipple's wasted frame, and he died.

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