OLD HEARTS AFLAME.

By P. Y. BLACK.

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I.

Corp Healy walked around the wire fence at the corner where the little schoolhouse stood with the elaborate air of one who is strolling about for want of something better to do. Yet he turned his head now and again and eyed the long verandas of the barracks and the men kicking about a foot ball on the frozen parade ground in a way which was almost guilty. They were not thinking of him at all, but the soldier twirled his stick and whistled with unusual loudness, an apparent attempt to convince observers that he was merely enjoying the fresh, cold wind that whistled over the brown plains and reddened his lean and leathery cheeks. One eye, however, he kept sharply on the school house door, and twice in five minutes he looked secretly at his watch. The door opened, and the children of the post came charging out, a tumbling group of boys and girls, little folk of the plains, soldiers' babes, clear-eyed and self-reliant. Healy walked more quickly around the corner and presented himself at the side door of the school, out of sight of barracks and parade ground. Graves, the soldier schoolmaster, was clearing his desk and preparing to follow the youngsters.

"Hallo!" he cried, looking up at the tall, straight, red-headed figure in the doorway, "coming to school, corporal? What reader shall I put you in?"

Healy grinned benignantly.

"Fur many's the year, Graves," he said, "the school of the batalion has been the only wan I've found nicissary, an' tactics has bin me rader. Shure I was passin' an' looked in upon yez. It's a wearin' job yez have, Graves, tachin' them kids, near as bad as drillin' rookies, I'm afther thinkin'."

"About," said Graves, taking up the door key.

"Ye've a great head, Graves," the corporal said, sweetly, with a flattering cock of his blue eye. "I've been hearin' the major towld the chaplain to lave yez be, as yez knew more than he did."

Graves laughed and sat down.

"When you flatter me like that, Healy," he said, "I know you're after something. What is it?"

"Nat at all, at all!" cried Healy, suddenly becoming nervous. "I wuz jist passin'. But seein' yez ain't busy, wud ye do me a favor, Mister Graves?"

"Mister!" cried Graves, laughing again.

"I'd be beggin' yez, though, to kape it to yourself," said Healy, earnestly, and plunging headlong into the matter on his mind. "It's no matther of shame, but the boys will be betther not to hear it, seein' as I might have to take their foolin' sarious. Wud yez give me yer opinion on that, Graves?"

Graves took a big sheet of foolscap from the corporal and read aloud:

"Sweet girl, accept a lowly heart,
Which now thy lover (with the major's permission) lays at thy feet.
For from thee, O darling, I cannot dwell apart,
Be mine I respectfully (and according to the rules and regulations of the service) do entreat."

"It's poethry, ye'll be afther noticin'," said Healy, beaming with such pride that he failed to observe the schoolmaster's red face and burst of chuckling coughs. "But I wanted yez, seein' ye're well known for a scholar, to tuch it up a bit, Graves. Ye'll observe, it don't sing itself, fur it's me furst attimpt since a boy. Thrue Poethry shud kin' uv go to a chune whin yez rade it, I belave."

"Well," said Graves, "my boys usually read the very best poetry sing-song, corporal. Is this a—a declaration?"

Healy blushed; at least his neck grew even redder than was customary. But he drew himself up very straight indeed, and answered boldly:

"In confidence, it's afther bein' that same, Graves. Is it all right?"

"Why spoil the sentiment by these bracketed assurances of the major giving his permission?"

"I'VE BEEN FEARED TO ASK. I THOUGHT I KILLED YOU."

"Aw, Graves," said the corporal, winking shrewdly, "whin I was younger, an' runnin' afther the gurls, 'twas mesilf was all sintiment, so it wuz. But igsparience has larned me that it's the puractical men gits there. I'm afther dillicately inshinuatin' to the lady that she'd needn't iver fear the major'll objict. Shure she knows a sojer requoires to ask lave to marry uv the commandin' officer. But it spiles the chune uv the poethry, an' that's whut I'm askin'. Wull ye jist drill it into shape, Graves, seein' ye're a scholar, which, I belave, includes poethry."

The schoolmaster good-naturedly assumed the task, and, much to the corporal's admiration, succeeded shortly in submitting to the old soldier a sufficiently creditable effusion, when Healy gratefully took his departure, leaving Graves to chuckle to himself for a long time in the deserted schoolhouse.

As the soldier left and took his way round the rear of the buildings, avoiding the neighborhood of the post trader's and the guardhouse, his manner was more suspicious than ever; the twirl of his stick and the blitheness of his whistle was affectedly nonchalant. He could not, though, if such were his purpose, avoid all notice, nor help meeting some one. He was almost beyond the post buildings and had settled to a business-like walk, when, just as he turned the corner of the corral, he ran fairly into Fin Strait, the farrier of his own troop. Like the corporal, Fin was a veteran, and the two were chums of long standing. The farrier's rooms in the stables had been the scene of many a quiet carouse, with none to join in it but the cronies themselves, and when Healy's pockets were empty and his throat hot-coppered of a morning, he was always sure of a surreptitious nip from Fin's stock of alcohol, supplied to the farrier as a horse medicine. Together they had come out of the war, together joined the regular army, together had campaigned in frequent Indian rising, and together they vaguely believed, if ever in their cups did they talk of it, they would be pensioned off, and look after the welfare of the old troop from a distance.

"How, Healy!"

"How, Fin!"

Healy twirled his stick like a drum major and chirruped "Garry Owen." If he had looked straight at old Fin, he might have been struck with the fact that the farrier's air was as guilty as his own. Strait, usually ready with a rude jocosity of greeting, now stood still and gazed with great thoughtfulness across the slope of the snowy plains, beyond the thread of cottonwood which fringed the creek, to the scattered houses of the little town beyond. The evening sunlight falling upon the low roofs, blanketed as in a sea of snow, softened the sordidness of the rude, wooden shacks, touched them with the artist's wand and made them, from a group of unseemly intruders, almost an acceptable part in the lonely grandeur of the wilderness. Healy's eyes unconsciously sought the same scene; his whistle died away, and his whirling stick dropped to the ground. The two hardened old campaigners were usually as remote from sentiment as gunbarrels, yet now they simultaneously sighed—the abrupt, gruff gasp of storm-weathered veteranhood, yet, unmistakably as the soft breath of a girl, the sigh of happiness and content and love.

At that unexpected and startling eruption in the breast of either, each turned as one caught in a deed of darkness and faced the other, reddening.

"It's not be kapin' yez, Fin, if it's afther walkin' yez are," said the corporal, almost angrily, and took a step forward.

"Only to the sutler's for a beer," said Fin, more conciliatory. "Will you have one?"

"I'm aff the booze," said Healy, shortly, and disappeared round the corral. "What the divil wuz he hangin' aroun' fur so mysterious?" he added, with most unfriendly irritation.

"Where's the old son-of-a-gun off to all alone, anyway, and what the dickens was he sighing about, like a blessed cook stuck on a dog robber?" the farrier soliloquized frowningly, as he strode to the post trader's for his beer. And over his glass he pondered long, until, as he drank a second one, his frown was heavy and black.

"By jiggers!" he cried suddenly to the startled bartender. "I'll take no chances anyway. I'll do it tonight or burst! Give me a beer, John, my boy, and good luck to both of us!"

II.

Once Healy was safely away, his long legs quickened their action until he almost ran down the sloping, slippery trail to the creek, across the unrailed dangerous bridge over the creek, and, with almost the hopeful spring of youth, across the plain to the outskirts of the mushroom town. It neared sunset when he reached the first outlying houses, and branched off across lots to one little two-storied cottage which stood quite by itself, very small, very neat, and very unprotected. Healy paused fifty yards from it and drew a long breath, blew it out again with explosive determination, and charged the little front door as if it were an Indian outpost. Yet when he reached it his knock was most modest and the martial red of his face trembled to a flickering pink. A little woman, as neat and unprotected looking as her house, opened the door. Perhaps it were more explanatory of her appearance to say that she looked as if inviting protection, such a slip of a woman, yet not devoid of plumpness in the cheek, such a blushing woman, yet not without a twinkle in her eye.

"O! Mr. Healy," said she, "I hardly expected—I am glad to see you. Won't you come in? What has brought you into the town again today?"

"Au, Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Bell," said Healy gallantly, "what wud be afther bringin' me but jist a soight o' thim swate eyes?"

"Mister Healy, I'm surprised," said the little widow, with a quicker twinkle of those dangerous eyes. "But I don't believe you. You people at the post all say the same thing, and none of you mean what you say, not one."

"Who—who—who's been darin' to say thim things?" cried Healy in angry surprise.

Mrs. Bell laughed gleefully.

"Come in, corporal," she said. "Do you think I'd tell you who said anything to me at all, and have you eating the poor things up? Do come in!"

"Begab an' I can't jist yet, Mrs. Bell," Healy answered. "They'll be afther callin' my name at retrate. Mrs. Bell, swate Mrs. Bell, I'm askin' yez to look at this wee bit av writin'."

"O!" cried the widow, suddenly animated. "Do tell! Is it an invite to a hop at the post? Are the soldiers going to give another dance?"

"Nat yit!" exclaimed Healy, throwing out a restraining hand as Mrs. Bell began to tear the envelope. "Nat yit," he repeated tenderly. "Whin I'm gone, Mrs. Bell. It's—it's—a matther av business, me dear."

"Business, corporal?"

"I'll be afther an answer tonight. Lit it be the roight wan, swate Mrs. Bell."

"O, Mr. Healy!" the widow murmured and blushed. Healy caught her in his arms and gave her a hearty kiss.

"O! O! Mr. Healy!" she cried and blushed again.

"Lit it be the roight wan, swate Mrs. Bell," the corporal repeated and ran away, himself a shamefaced red, and fearful to look round to see if any one had noticed them.

The farrier, being a privileged character, was excused from tattoo roll call. Therefore there was nothing to hinder him, an hour after retreat, from locking his room door in the troop stables and speeding away through a slight fall of snow, on pleasure bent. So it happened, while Corporal Healy was standing stiffly to attention along with his troop, answering the call of his name at tattoo, with the snow gathering thickly about them, that Fin Strait was comfortably seated in the neat little unprotected house, protecting from all comers the neat little widow.

"But I must be going," he said, for the tenth time. "It's getting late and the snow gets deeper every minute. If I want to get home at all tonight I should be going now, Mrs. Bell."

"Yes, Mr. Strait."

"I was thinking you must be very lonely here since—you know—"

The widow's eyes ceased to twinkle, and winked away a tear or two.

"It is lonely, Mr. Strait," she answered him.

Fin shuffled his feet nervously and looked out beneath the neat red window shades.

"It's still snowing," said he. "Mrs. Bell."

"Yes, Mr. Strait."

"It's not lonely up at the post," said Fin, and rubbed the crossed brass sabers on his hat with sudden fury.

The widow sighed.

"But I can't live at the post, Mr. Strait," she answered, and stood in the middle of the floor, thoughtfully playing with her marriage ring. The farrier looked at her timidly, tenderly.

"Sit down, Mrs. Bell," he cried, desperately. "If you can't find a chair, sit down here."

And he pulled the widow on his knee.

"O, Mr. Strait!" said Mrs. Bell, but resisted very gently.

"Will you come and live at the post as my wife?" the farrier whispered, but the wicked widow, conscious of an offer from the corporal now in her pocket, played with the farrier.

"O, Mr. Strait," she said, "you soldiers at the post all say the same thing, and none of you mean it—not one."

At that there came a modest rap at the door, and the widow jumped to open it. It is probable that she knew who it was, for the twinkle of her eyes betrayed a love of mischief, but she evinced great surprise at seeing Corporal Healy standing in the snow. She threw the door wide and hospitably open.

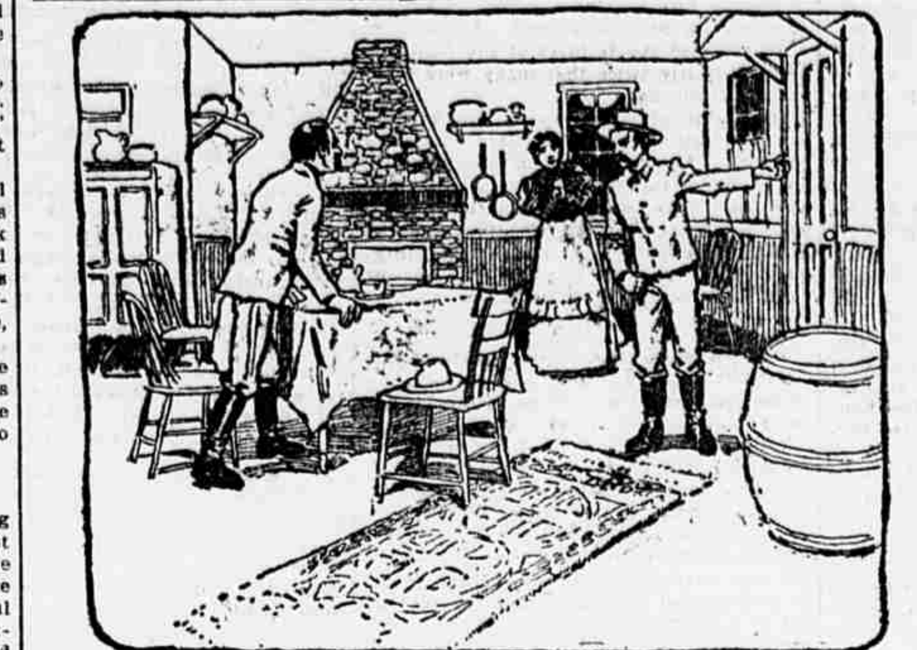
"Why, Mr. Healy," said she, "to think you'd come through all that snow—for the second time today, too. You must like the town. Come right in."

"If it had snowed baynits and sabers, me darlint," cried Healy, entering, "I'd have come for——"

He did not finish the sentence. He saw his old friend, Fin, and the corporal's face turned red and white and darkly purple in quick succession. The farrier had risen to his feet at the sound of the soldier's voice, and the two faced each other in the cozy little parlor, with for the first time since they were both recruits fierce anger in their eyes. The widow closed the door, and began to laugh and chatter.

"How funny now!" she cried. "Here's you two, whom the folks at the post call the brethren, you're so thick and such old friends, and you've never met at my house before. How funny!"

So she chattered while her lips were yet red with honest Fin's kiss, and Healy's appeal crumpled in her pocket. Old hearts are more slow to flame to either love or anger than those that are young, but once afire they burn with the snap and glare of fury. Healy heard nothing of Mrs. Bell's chatter; his ears were full of a savage humming, like the buzz of a Kaffir impi. The farrier did not look at her; his eyes were fixed on the corporal's. In the breasts of both there blazed the same primitive passion of jealousy which maddens at times the stags of the mountains, the tigers of the jungle. For the sake of a woman's lip, the comradeship of a score of years was forgotten.



"WILL YE COME OUT?"

The corporal found his voice first.

"Axcuse me, Mrs. Bell," he said with a hoarse voice, "fur dishturbin' yez. It's business I'm afther havin' wid Farrier Strait. Will ye come out?"

He shot the last words angrily at his old friend, and as quickly as the defiance reached his ear Fin took a step forward. Healy turned to the widow and bowed with stiff, soldierly formality.

"I'll be likely in town tomorrow," said he, "on the matter av the business betwixt us."

At once the ferrier faced the widow.

"Mrs. Bell," said he, "tomorrow I'll seek an answer to my question."

But the widow made no answer; she was now pale and trembling.

"Corporal," she stammered, "Mr. Strait!"

They were swiftly gone, however, the farrier closing the door behind him, and the widow sat down, no little frightened at such sudden mutual wrath. The smartest and most amorous of youthful lovers she could have managed, playing one against the other, but the white heat of these veterans was beyond her power to cool. She warmed her pretty white hands at the stove and shivered and laughed a little and cried a little in turn.

"The two silly old things," she murmured. "To go and fight when one's just as nice as the other!"

III.

The snow had ceased falling and the air was colder, as the two soldiers strode away from the little house, up the trail to the post, in grim silence for many minutes. If the landscape, the unutterably solemn calm of the snow-covered plain at eventide, had affected them, the same great plain, with its broad breasts yet more deeply blanketed in purest white, glimmering shadowily in the light of an uncertain, cloud-chased moon should have now restored peace to their hearts. Nothing of nature's calm could yet do that. Healy, his chin sticking out, his thin lips rigidly tight, marched on blindly, clenching and unclenching his great bony hands. A pace to the corporal's rear Fin followed, but he, after the first few hundred yards, so far conquered his passion as to attempt nonchalance. He forced himself to whistle, and lessened the angry determination of his stride. So, for all that apparently merry tune Healy stopped in the deep shadow of the cottonwoods and faced his old crony. Many a time had the two followed that road waveringly, late at night, stumbling against each other, singing loudly and stopping to laugh, on days when they had been in the town together for a frolic, before the widow had given each a secret to keep from the other. Always then they had chosen the bridge and the shadows of the cottonwoods for the last halt before their snarly bunks should receive them, to finish the bottle and exchange the last reminiscence of their faraway youthful days. Now they halted here again, and Healy threw off his coat.

"We've no recroolies, to want the whole troop to see us, Fin Strait," said he, "We can have each other fur fair play."

Fin laughed uneasily, and did not take off his coat. His anger was apt to cool more quickly than the other's.

"Wat's eatin' you, Healy?" he asked. "We ain't recroolies, as you say, an' before I fight I want to know what I'm fightin' about. It's the woman, of course."

"So it is," said Healy shortly. "Whip me an' go fur yer answer tomorrow. If I whip you, sure 'tis tother way."

"Go slow, Healy, till you cool down a bit, an', now the blood's cooled, I'll grant you've the better right to her. But I've no grudge about a thing's settled. She had her choice, free to pick out the one she likes. She's good to both of us."

"Yis, she's choosed," said Healy, fiercely. "An' whin I've whipped yez fur yer interferin' tonight, tomorrow she'll say 'yis' to me."

"Ye're late for inspection, Healy, my boy," he said. "'Twas tonight she sat on my knee and said she'd have me. Isn't that as good as saying 'yes'?"

"Go easy! Ye'd better take that back!"

"Ye're a dirty liar!"

In a second Fin's coat was thrown on the snow, and then, of a sudden, the two became outwardly calm. The shadows of the branches flitted across their faces, but the moonlight was quite good enough for each to watch the other's eyes. These, though still vengeful, were the eyes of practiced boxers, for, indeed there were few among the younger men who could beat the brethren at the gloves. Also each man remembered that if he were so beaten as to be ashamed to show himself next day at the little house in the town the rival suitor would have won the widow. Therefore they fought, in spite of their rage, with science and self-control. It was no romantic duel; there was no clash of swords, the men were no courtly knights, the lady no high-born maid. The affair was a very vulgar one—two common soldiers of an age to know better, of a friendship which should have been above such folly, battering each other brutally with fists for the hand of a woman whose late husband had been a government teamster. It is to be conceived, however, that the sneering moon never looked down upon a combat fought by young lovers with honest wounded hearts more fiercely aflame.

In utter silence they fought until the snow was beaten and scattered by their dancing feet. There was no need here of seconds, no need of an arbiter of the code. Feint, parry, smash; a moment's play for breath, a close, a wrestle; up and come again. The old boys were strictly honest, and, though none saw save that flying moon and an occasional jackrabbit startled in its tracks, each would have scorned to take an unfair advantage, to be guilty of a foul. Round after round, with all memory of their former comradeship forgotten, with no thought save the mad ones of a jealous rivalry, they struggled together. There was little difference in their weights, but Healy was the wirier, and neither man's wind was as good as in the days of early campaigns. So it happened that, after half an hour's fierce fighting, when both were bloody, and both more full of wrath than ever, they fell together, and rolled in the trampled snow, too blown to spring up. Healy had the upper hold, and he cried in Fin Strait's ear:

"Tek it back—about the kiss! Tek it back an' swear ye'll have the widdy be!"

Fin gasped a sturdy, fierce defiance, and Healy's hand was raised over him, when there came faintly thrilling over the snow the first clear note of a bugle. Healy's hand dropped harmlessly and he raised his head and pricked his ears like a dog at the call of the master. More loudly rang the bugle, and suddenly the rivals were apart, sitting in the snow, listening intently. Clear and shrill at last, loud, commanding, blood-burning, sang the bugle boldly, so that the cold air thrilled through the cottonwoods, and every living thing on the plain stood still to listen. Ere the trumpeter was half through with the call, the disciplined soldiers were on their feet, as they would have struggled to their feet at that call if a sword had passed through the body of each. All love and jealousy and hate must wait when thus the trumpets call.

"'Tis boots an' saddles!" cried Fin. "An' me not at the stables!"

With that each seized his coat, and, all regardless of their bruised faces and blood-stained shirts, they ran swiftly to the post. There was rushing of men to the corrals, the sharp commands of officers, the click of revolvers as they were hastily loaded, saddling of horses, curses of men belated, hasty issuing of ammunition, and at last the cool, clear voice of the captain of the troop:

"Prepare to mount! Mount! Form ranks!"

The corporal and the farrier were in their accustomed places, breathing hard, flushed and bloody, but ready—ready as any lance corporal there, the pride of a first sergeant's heart. Then a whisper passed from man to man down the line of horsemen.

"There's an outbreak on the Suckeriver reserve. They've killed the agent, and the reds have massacred a ranchman and his family."

The moon had disappeared. Great grey clouds had been blown by the gathering wind, and once more the snow fell, but now more fiercely, more heavily than ever before. Through it the little bluecoated column proceeded at a determined trot, to the place some twenty miles away, where the uprising Indians were supposed to be gathered together. A plainsman, who had brought the news of the massacre and the regular government scout attached to the post, led the way. As ranking corporal, Healy rode on the right of the first set of fours; the farrier was back in the column, so that, for a time the rivals were effectually separated. But this midnight expedition, although it thrilled the hearts of younger men, troubled the minds of the two veterans little. They rode on as a matter of duty, just as they would, if ordered, have gone through the manual of arms. The unfinished fight had left them with heated brain too full of jealousy and disappointment and hate to do more than brood over the fancied treachery of each. The two old comrades who had fought so often side by side, who had shared so many stirrup charges, of friendly frolics, of pains and pleasure shared together. True comrades once they were bitter foes now.

Faster and faster the snow drove in their faces, deeper and deeper it lay on the trail, to be scattered high by the laboring feet of the horses. To right and to left, one yard away from the column, nothing could be distinguished; a trooper could but faintly see the man in front of him. Only the halfbreed guide and the trained plainsman could discern an unerring path through that storm. In their hands the captain had to leave his troop and himself. There was no pause, for revenge on the tribe must be swift to be sure. At every clearer space, where the freezing wind had swept the trail clean of drifts, the guide turned to the captain, and he, pressing his knees to his horse, when at once the troop broke into a gallop, with jingling of bridle chains, of steel and thunder of hoofs. So they rode, each man silently grim, swiftly through the night and the storm.

They reached the place before daylight, once they heard the yapping of dogs and the shrill voices of squaws, and the chant and yells of blood-frenzied savages. In the fancied security of the storm, the reds in their tepees were celebrating their hideous triumph to the monotonous beat of the drum and the shrill song of the warriors and the dance of the warpath.

The grim captain halted his column and gave his orders, and in a minute every man knew his part. The guide had reconnoitered in front and came back whispering. Then slowly on the whistling wind came the soft command along the line:

"Forward, march! Trot, march! Gallop, march!"

And loud and clear there followed the stirring yell, "Charge!" and the clean-cut note of the trumpet, that one long heart-thumping note that sends a man to death as willingly as to the dance. Down they went on the camp, into the blackness of the night, into the whirl of the blizzard, and at once it was impossible to see one's right-hand man to keep aligned. It was each man for himself, with the thought of a murdered woman and child to steel his heart nad nerve his hand and direct his aim. The Indians were not all unready. Their arms were at hand, and very quickly they realized that the white men had braved even the blizzard to seek revenge, and were upon them. In a tumult of yells and hasty orders the chiefs sprang to repel the attack. In a moment all was a corner of hell. Shout and curse and dying yell, continuous crack of rifle and revolver, screech of squaw, bark of dog and crash of falling tepee as some headlong trooper charged madly into it. Over it all, round it all, the deadly wind shrieked and the snow fell unceasingly.

In the midst of it, right in the center of the camp, two men came crash together, and in that instant recognized each other. In neither's mind was even that charge the uppermost thing. With a sudden mutual curse their rage was let loose. Healy extended his arm and fired, not two yards from his old comrade. Old Fin, the farrier, gave a terrible scream, and Healy saw him drop. But even in falling the veteran sought revenge, and his pistol was discharged. The corporal felt a sting in his side; the noise all suddenly ceased, and he also dropped inanimate from his horse.

IV.

In a little separate room in the post hospital the old campaigner came out of the fever, out of the delirium, weeks after the fight on the Snake river. The doctor was with him, and a stiffly upright and martial attendant.

"You've the constitution of a horse, Healy," said the doctor, "You ought to have died, you know. Take this and go to sleep, and don't bother about the widow you've been raving over for two weeks. A man of your age ought to know better. Never mind, if you'll keep quiet, you can go to see her, whoever she is, before very long."

They left the veteran alone in semi-darkness, but the drink the doctor gave him did not send him to sleep. He lay thinking, thinking, thinking, until at last, with shuddering horror, he had the facts clear in his mind. The widow? He shrank from the thought of her. She was but a woman he had known for a little while, whom he had gone crazy over like any young fool, and—and for love of her he had become a murderer. A murderer! Poor old Fin! Good old Fin! Fin had nursed him after the fever in the Bad Lands; could any widow have done it more carefully? Fin and he had held of a band of Ogalallas all one afternoon in a rifle pit, until help came, and Fin had risked his scalp twice that day to get water. Would any widow have stuck to a pal like that? Fin Strait—the best friend, the warmest-hearted, closest comrade, a soldier ever had—he had killed him. Homicide! It was worse than that—fratricide. Had they not always been nicknamed "the brethren?" What was the widow to a brother?

When the attendans came in again, old Healy was very silent. For many days longer he lay, feverish but still, asking no questions. He knew that no man could have seen the deed in that whirl of snow and blackness; that Fin's death would be credited to the Indians. But that thought gave him no ease. With the honest simplicity of a child, he felt it would be some relief to confess, to go to the major and be courtmartialed, tried, hung. Hour after hour he spent in recalling every incident of his twenty years' friendship—the war, the fierce Indian fighting after the war, the comparative ease that had come to them when they were privileged characters with the officers of the regiment, because of their long and faithful service. He felt a scornful horror of himself, and a terrible loathing for the laughing woman who would kiss two men on the same day and send them out, frenzied, to kill each other.

Yet he got well pretty quickly, for, as the doctor said, he had the constitution of a horse. One warm day he was peremptorily ordered out, much against his will, to take the air on the broad veranda which ran round the hospital. He got himself comfortable in a low chair in a quiet corner and began for the hundreth time to go over all the murdered man had done for him in those long, active years of fun and fighting. His head dropped on his breast and he dumbly thought of suicide. Round the corner of the house came the unmistakable thump, thump of a man on crutches. Healey's eyes sought the corner vacantly. In an instant they opened wide with fear and he rose to his feet, spreading out his hands to fend off something horrible. The man on crutches stopped. He was pale with long sickness when he turned the corner, but now his face colored and his eyes lit up with sudden unspeakable relief and joy.

"Howly mother, defind me!" cried Healey. "Aw, fur me sins, it's thrue I killed him, but I'm near crazy fur the sorro' uv it. I'll confess it all, Fin, an' be hanged like a man. Ye can have the widdy, d—— her, if she's any good to yez now, but go back to your grave an' lave me be, fur the sake uv ould toimes!"

"Healy! Healy!" gasped the man on crutches, hopping toward him. "I've been feared to ask. I thought I killed you. Healy, you d—— old chump! Healy! O! Lord! I'm thankful for this!"

"Fin," said Healy, slowly ceasing to tremble. "Is it rale fiish an' blood yez are? Me God, but I can't believe it!"

But touch of familiar hands reassured the veteran, and in another minute the two sat side by side, and—there were no recruits to see—their hands were clasped in each other's, and their eyes were wet. They did not refer, save briefly, to their nearly fatal quarrel, understanding that each, in a moment's madness, had fired on the other, and each, when convalescent, had been afraid to ask for news of his friend. For a long time they were silent, until old Fin looked slyly at the corporal.

"She's married!" he said abruptly.

"Chuh!" said Healy.

"To the schoolmaster Graves," said Fin.

"The divil," said Healy, and suddenly laughed loudly.

"Healy," said the farrier solemnly, "weemin is frauds."

"Ye're roight, so ye are, Fin," said the corporal, and hitched up his chair more closely to Strait's, with a sigh of content.

Largest Bible in the World.

In 1857 Mindon-min, king of Burma, erected a monument near Mandalay called the Kutho-daw. There he built 700 temples, in each of which there is a slab of white marble. Upon these 700 slabs is engraved the whole of the Buddhist bible, a vast literature in itself, equal to about six copies of the Holy Scriptures.

This marble bible, relates the Boston Traveler, is engraved in the Pali language, thought to be that spoken by Buddha himself 500 B. C. Photographs of some of these inscriptions have reached England, and Prof. Max Muller—perhaps the greatest linguist in the world—has examined them. But, alas for all this human ingenuity and perseverance! If his majesty Mindon-min thought to perpetuate the teaching of the Great Buddha by causing it to be graven on the rock he nourished a vain ambition. The climate of Burma is moist, and its effects have already wrought said havoc on the surface of the white marble, and the photographs show a partial effacement of some of the Burmese characters in which the Pali text is engraved.

There is certainly the largest known copy of any portion of literature. Even the National Encyclopedia of China, in 5,000 volumes, occupies a comparatively small space. To reach the other end of the limits of the "printers' and engravers' art, we need only remember the "Smallest bible in the world," and the Diamond editions of Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius.

To engrave the bible of Buddha on the marble slabs in the temples of Kutho-daw must have cost thousands of dollars, but these sermons in stone are easily outlasted by a copy of the new testament which, beautifully printed, can be bought for 25 cents, and if carefully cherished will last many generations.

The Omaha Bee's

Photogravures of the Exposition

No exposition has excelled the Trans-Mississippi in architectural splendor and artistic beauty—yet before the snow flies it will be only a memory, were it not for the aid of the photographer's art. In all its varied beauty, the splendor of the Grand court and the fun of the Midway—all the many scenes of the Exposition have been reproduced by

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7—Hagenback's on Children's Day.
8—Grand Court, Looking Southwest.
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