

Ashes of Empire.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

CHAPTER XXIII.

From the 1st of November the situation in Paris became more alarming day by day. During the beginning of the siege the fear of bombardment had driven people to hang out ambulance flags or hoist the colors of neutral nations over their houses, hoping that the German cannon might spare buildings so protected. Over the dismal freezing streets thousands of dirty, tattered flags, mere rags for the most part, still fluttered in the November wind, although the inhabitants of the wretched city began to regard the Prussian siege guns as myths. In all the weeks of fighting that had passed since the first Uhlans entered into Versailles, not a single cannon shot from the Prussian lines had been fired against the city. Now the people no longer believed in the Prussian cannon.

Yet with the opening days of November there came into the streets of Paris something new, something mysterious, intangible, vaguely dreadful. It was reflected in the thin, pinched faces of the people; it lurked in the hollow eyes of the soldiers—it was everywhere, in the cold gray waters of the Seine, in the sad twilight of the lampless streets, in the brooding November clouds. It was not fear; it was not despair. It was the fear of despair.

The boulevards were no longer frequented; the cafes, the vital sparks of life to boulevard and street, were now closed at 10 o'clock. With the closing of the cafes the last sign of animation left the streets, and at 10 o'clock the city lay in darkness, save for the dark figures on the icy ramparts, clustered to watch the flash of some great gun, the far flare of the shell, the monotone rattle of the machine gun, the rattle of the shells of the forts of the south.

But the sickly light of dawn now fell on crowded streets instead of empty ones, for everywhere at the doors of butcher stalls interminable lines of women stood, card in hand, waiting to draw their meager rations of horseflesh.

There were few cabs and fewer omnibuses left in the city; the government needed horses for artillery and cavalry; the people needed food. Factories had closed everywhere, save where the coal steel works flamed, turning out cannon. Most of the railroad stations stood silent and empty; the Orleans station, however, served for balloon manufacture.

One by one the last gas jets were cut off and public buildings lighted with candles and petroleum. Now even these gave out. The police existed no longer, the national guard was supposed to perform police duties. There was no communication with the outside world except when a rare spy evaded the Prussian lines—or by balloons and pigeons. Once or twice spies, sent from the provinces, came into Paris, a few pigeons found their way into the besieged city, but no balloons ever returned.

The balloons left Paris at night to avoid the fire of the German outposts. Some were never again heard from, some were lost at sea, some fell in Belgium. A number, however, descended in the southern provinces, where Gambetta was performing prodigies—to his own satisfaction—and occasionally deciding Paris with foolish announcements of success for the French arms in the south and the imminent arrival of the army of the Loire before the walls of Paris.

The army of the Loire? What heights of hope, what depths of despair marked its brief career? On the ramparts the starving soldiers looked out into the fog for the army that never came; in the filthy streets starving women and sick children

listened for the sound of its cannon. Rumors grew to certainties; the army of the Loire had halted; its cannon had been heard in the west—in the south; its rockets signaled victory and rescue from the east! Then the freezing straits echoed with din of galloping batteries; sudden columns of cavalry filled the outer boulevards, tramping past in eager silence, endless masses of infantry swung through the icy streets with the startling out-cry of drums echoing and re-echoing from window to pavement, while the great guns boomed on the point du Jour, the fort de Vincennes, the fort de Vanves to St. Denis and from Remonville to the battery of the Double Crown.

Then, after the sortie came the ambulances, file after file, leading the frozen roads to the battleground. And the return—the creaking wagon loads of dying, the stench of musty blood-soaked straw, the spectral regiments tramping through the gates, the ragged crowd looking on, freezing, starving, dumb with misery, yet ready for another sortie when the dull governor of Paris could stir from the shadow of his shadow-haunted chamber.

Little by little the rations of horse meat were reduced to the miserable scrap of

horseflesh for adults and fifteen grammes for children. White bread had disappeared; there was no flour left. A hard, dry morsel of black bread was rationed daily to the people, scarcely enough to sustain life until the dawn of another day brought another crust.

The newspapers published schedules of prices from week to week; the poor, shivering in the bitter November dawn, stood hour after hour, ragged, sick, ankle deep in slush, patiently awaiting their rations of lean horseflesh and reading the weekly schedules to pass the time.

Nobody except the very rich could dream of buying such prices. The poor, trembling in the cutting slush, read the schedules as they waited hour after hour until their turn came in the long file. Then wrapping the bit of frozen bone and flesh in their rags, they crept back to fireless homes. And no one murmured in one complain; one thought of surrender. Here and there in the line some women, weak with starvation, fell down in the snow; here and there some young girls, cheeks flaming with fever, screamed out in sudden delirium and staggered off into the city—raving of warm fires and white bread and the mercy of God. The rest looked on in silence; the shivering line closed up; the next old woman hobbled away with her food, mumbling and muttering of battles to come and the honor of France.

There was no fuel left for the poor; mothers burned their furniture to save their babes from freezing; the green wood from the Bois de Boulogne and the forest of Vincennes gave out little heat and a great deal of smoke for those who could afford to buy it. Bands of ruffians sacked the government woodyards at night, scarcely recoiling before the bayonets of the national guard; troops of gamins hunted the sewer holes for rats, or watched the gardens of the rich for the rancid rats that had almost disappeared from the gamins-stricken city. The animals in the zoological gardens, with the exception of the lions and tigers, were killed and eaten one by one, their bones boiled for broth, even their skin scraped and steeped to gather the last shred of nutriment. It was in the frightfully stricken city noeddy spoke of surrender—unless it were M. Renan, dining comfortably at his cafe, where, napkin in hand, he could discuss human brotherhood and the wickedness of resistance—where he could strip off his coat and go into the desolate streets to ponder on his dexterity in hair-splitting debate, and the degeneracy of his native land. Now, God help such as he—in France, in the western world—abroad and at home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

In Hilde's Chamber.

When Hilde was carried to the house on the ramparts unconsciousness had already succeeded her brief delirium. Yolette's first transports at sight of Hilde and Bourke were followed by days of terror and agonized hope. Hilde was very ill, so ill that Bourke brought a Sister of Mercy to the house in the first days of November and spent his money, almost to the last franc, for the necessities that meant, perhaps, life to Hilde.

But now the good Sister of Mercy had gone to the hospital again and Yolette sat all day long at Hilde's bedside, watching her sister grow better and stronger.

The scar on her forehead healed, promising to show, however, as a tiny white crescent, the reaction from the horror of that October night. Hilde's eyes were bright and clear, she grew stronger every day, but her beauty, too, returned; the hollows in temple and cheek disappeared, the scarlet came back to her lips, exquisite whiteness to neck and hands. But in the dark eyes Bourke saw that the last spark of childhood had died out forever; only the sadness of woman remained—the tenderness, the willfulness, the sweetness of a woman who loves, who fears and who waits.

When in the last weeks of November she was well enough, she told Bourke how Speyer and his carbiniers had forced her into an ambulance, how they had traversed the distracted city, how Flourens had met Speyer and his detachment and had ordered him to place Hilde and Red Riding Hood in the fortified church, where already a dozen frightened gray nuns had been imprisoned.

What fate Flourens designed for the gray nuns Bourke could not conjecture; what fate had been reserved for Hilde he dared not imagine. He told her nothing of the murder of Speyer except that he was dead; he never spoke of the fate of Mon Oncle or Bibi, nor did she ever mention it, although both Hilde and Red Riding Hood had seen the killing of those eminent ruffians.

Bourke read in the newspaper that the government troops were hunting for Flourens and Buckhurst and that for the moment the carbiniers had stunk off and mixed in with their equally ferocious fellow citizens of Belleville. The Undertakers' club, however, continued, and, as this was really the head and heart of Flourens' battalions of handits and the government weakly permitted its doors to remain open, it was called only a question of time when Flourens and his carbiniers should once more reappear on the scene and raise the red flag of revolt. Buckhurst, it was known, in company with a creature named Sapia and the veteran Manqup, was already deep in a mysterious secret society that pretended to represent the entire national guard and called itself the Central Committee. Naturally, it was a revolutionary group, an obscure band of outcasts, who sat like buzzards watching the agonized city until

their moment should arrive to fatten on its ruins.

When, in the early days of October, Bourke's foresight had provided lists of preserved meat and vegetables as a reserve in time of famine Hilde and Yolette had laughed at such precautions. But now these cans and tins of provisions had become the only food of the little household. Even white Hilde was ill Yolette obstinately refused to take any of the delicacies provided by Bourke. The marauding carbiniers had only begun to loot the cellar when the news of their defeat at the Hotel de Ville sent them packing, therefore the provisions remained practically untouched up to the day when Bourke refused to renew the government card that entitled the little household to rations of horseflesh and black bread for three adults and a child.

Yolette baked little biscuits in the kitchen. Red Riding Hood made soup. And now that Hilde was well enough to come down stairs, they had dinner in the dining room again, where, from their store of fuel, a good fire burned in the grate, and a candle sent its cheerful yellow rays into the chill of the black hallway. The shadow that fell on the house did not come from the battle clouds gathering swiftly in the south, nor from the sleet, the bitter cold, the rain, nor yet from the spectacle of the splendid, desolate city, naked and famished, filthy and diseased. There was something else that touched Hilde's face with the subtle pallor that made her silence heart-breaking and her forced smiles terrible. Bourke knew. At such moments he would begin: "You see, Hilde, my theory is this: Jim, finding that Le Bourget was threatened, struck out for himself, and wriggled through the Prussian lines, somewhere between the fort de la Briche and St. Denis. That's

and that that city has been recaptured by German troops.

"If, nevertheless, your excellency judges it advisable to convince yourself by one of your officers, I will not fail to furnish him with a safe conduct to go there and on."

"Permit me, general, to express the high consideration with which I have the honor to be your very humble and very obedient servant." (Signed)

"The Chief of the General Staff."

"The Count von Moltke."

The news stunned the people; at first nobody credited it. The governor began ostentatiously preparations for another sortie, alas! against the very village he had abandoned when it was in his own hands—Le Bourget. But it was not until the end of December that he was ready to begin, and then the cold became so frightful that 900 men froze on a single night in the trenches, and during the last ten days of the month 20,000 soldiers were carried to the hospitals. The attack on Le Bourget was abandoned.

The moral and material sufferings of the miserable people of Paris were terrible beyond description. The mortality among children reached a figure that seemed unbelievable—2,500 in a single week. There was no milk for them, they could not swallow the black bread, the flesh of horses and mules, so they died, some from fevers, many from the cold, many from starvation.

In December, toward Christmas time, the first signs of discouragement appeared among the people. Deluged with false dispatches, manufactured by the wholesale and printed in the government's official journal, the poor people at last became aware of the bitter deception—the false news of victory followed inevitably by early arrivals of disaster. Their houses, each day reborn, each night dead, their momentary joy and pride

at the announcement of successes ruthlessly destroyed by the lying government, led them more surely and more swiftly toward despair than if they had been told the truth, no matter how sad.

Yet even then nobody spoke of surrender—always excepting M. Renan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December 31 he wandered about the sombre boulevards, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all aglitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand hotel a sick man and a few little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hilde. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tin box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the bells, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and whatever she thought of, she thought of Bourke and said her prayers for France and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hilde, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice.

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, intercede for papa who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the army of the Loire."

"General," whispered Hilde. The child rose from her knees; Hilde drew her into the bed and warmed the little body against her own. The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. A few later the battalions of the Four-Jour passed in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hilde. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Yes, little one."

"Was it our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fell at the city hundreds and hundreds of you ago?"

"I don't know," said Hilde faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about St. Genevieve and about St. Hilde of Carhaix."

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mlle. Hilde?"

"Since he went away."

The child's arms sought Hilde's neck; they fastened on her hair.

"Hear the cannon! Whispered the child; "they are very loud tonight. Do you think our Lord Jesus is listening to the cannon?"

Hilde did not reply. The child spoke again, as though to herself:

"I am somewhat up there near the stars, you know. The cannon cannot hurt Him. He is sorry for us when we are cold and when the Prussians shoot our fathers. When we sin He is sorry, for we go to hell unless—unless—"

"Hush," murmured Hilde, "sleep little one." The child whispered.

"Mlle. Hilde, I cannot sleep, because you are crying."

"Hush," said Hilde, "those who weep are sometimes pardoned."

"Have you sinned?" asked the child innocently.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Beginning of the End.

The knocking was repeated; Hilde sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

"It came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

"We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Fort Rouge."

Hilde sprang from her bed, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came downstairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining room, for there was no other means of illumination. The hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside the street was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering in the frosty dawn. Already a Red Cross flag hung over the doorsteps, its soiled folds floating lazily with every lev air current.

When the first stretcher appeared, borne by priests, the cavalry moved on, endless lines of them, and the sad trumpet's peal was echoed by steel cuirasses clashing and the clanging of armor and sabres. One by one the ambulances creaked up the street from the Porte Rouge, one by one the stretchers passed. Every house received its load of wounded. Every house hoisted the Red Cross.

Yolette and Hilde helped the soldiers strap on the floor; all the rooms on the ground floor were taken, and the wounded lay there side by side, half frozen, pale as corpses. There were a few French among them, some blond fellows, starting at everybody with mild blue eyes. One of them, a mere boy, watched Hilde as she moved about with cups of hot brandy, silently waiting his turn—which never came, for he died without a sound before she reached his bed.

It was late in the afternoon when the surgeons came. Hilde and Yolette gave up their places to some sad-eyed Sisters of Mercy. Bourke insisted that they should go to Harwood's room on the floor above. They always excepted M. Renan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December 31 he wandered about the sombre boulevards, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all aglitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand hotel a sick man and a few little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hilde. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tin box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the bells, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and whatever she thought of, she thought of Bourke and said her prayers for France and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hilde, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice.

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, intercede for papa who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the army of the Loire."

"General," whispered Hilde. The child rose from her knees; Hilde drew her into the bed and warmed the little body against her own. The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. A few later the battalions of the Four-Jour passed in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hilde. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Yes, little one."

"Was it our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fell at the city hundreds and hundreds of you ago?"

"I don't know," said Hilde faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about St. Genevieve and about St. Hilde of Carhaix."

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mlle. Hilde?"

"Since he went away."

The child's arms sought Hilde's neck; they fastened on her hair.

"Hear the cannon! Whispered the child; "they are very loud tonight. Do you think our Lord Jesus is listening to the cannon?"

Hilde did not reply. The child spoke again, as though to herself:

"I am somewhat up there near the stars, you know. The cannon cannot hurt Him. He is sorry for us when we are cold and when the Prussians shoot our fathers. When we sin He is sorry, for we go to hell unless—unless—"

"Hush," murmured Hilde, "sleep little one." The child whispered.

"Mlle. Hilde, I cannot sleep, because you are crying."

"Hush," said Hilde, "those who weep are sometimes pardoned."

"Have you sinned?" asked the child innocently.

"St. Hilde of Carhaix, witness for me! I do not know," sobbed Hilde. O, God! O, God!—to have him back!—only to have him back!"

"There is some one knocking," said the child.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Beginning of the End.

The knocking was repeated; Hilde sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

"It came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

"We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Fort Rouge."

Hilde sprang from her bed, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came downstairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining room, for there was no other means of illumination. The hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside the street was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering in the frosty dawn. Already a Red Cross flag hung over the doorsteps, its soiled folds floating lazily with every lev air current.

When the first stretcher appeared, borne by priests, the cavalry moved on, endless lines of them, and the sad trumpet's peal was echoed by steel cuirasses clashing and the clanging of armor and sabres. One by one the ambulances creaked up the street from the Porte Rouge, one by one the stretchers passed. Every house received its load of wounded. Every house hoisted the Red Cross.

Yolette and Hilde helped the soldiers strap on the floor; all the rooms on the ground floor were taken, and the wounded lay there side by side, half frozen, pale as corpses. There were a few French among them, some blond fellows, starting at everybody with mild blue eyes. One of them, a mere boy, watched Hilde as she moved about with cups of hot brandy, silently waiting his turn—which never came, for he died without a sound before she reached his bed.

It was late in the afternoon when the surgeons came. Hilde and Yolette gave up their places to some sad-eyed Sisters of Mercy. Bourke insisted that they should go to Harwood's room on the floor above. They always excepted M. Renan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December 31 he wandered about the sombre boulevards, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all aglitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand hotel a sick man and a few little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hilde. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tin box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the bells, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and whatever she thought of, she thought of Bourke and said her prayers for France and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hilde, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice.

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, intercede for papa who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the army of the Loire."

"General," whispered Hilde. The child rose from her knees; Hilde drew her into the bed and warmed the little body against her own. The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. A few later the battalions of the Four-Jour passed in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hilde. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Yes, little one."

"Was it our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fell at the city hundreds and hundreds of you ago?"

"I don't know," said Hilde faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about St. Genevieve and about St. Hilde of Carhaix."

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mlle. Hilde?"

"Since he went away."

The child's arms sought Hilde's neck; they fastened on her hair.

"Hear the cannon! Whispered the child; "they are very loud tonight. Do you think our Lord Jesus is listening to the cannon?"

Hilde did not reply. The child spoke again, as though to herself:

"I am somewhat up there near the stars, you know. The cannon cannot hurt Him. He is sorry for us when we are cold and when the Prussians shoot our fathers. When we sin He is sorry, for we go to hell unless—unless—"

"Hush," murmured Hilde, "sleep little one." The child whispered.

"Mlle. Hilde, I cannot sleep, because you are crying."

"Hush," said Hilde, "those who weep are sometimes pardoned."

"Have you sinned?" asked the child innocently.

"St. Hilde of Carhaix, witness for me! I do not know," sobbed Hilde. O, God! O, God!—to have him back!—only to have him back!"

"There is some one knocking," said the child.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Beginning of the End.

The knocking was repeated; Hilde sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

"It came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

"We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Fort Rouge."

Hilde sprang from her bed, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came downstairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining room, for there was no other means of illumination. The hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside the street was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering in the frosty dawn. Already a Red Cross flag hung over the doorsteps, its soiled folds floating lazily with every lev air current.

When the first stretcher appeared, borne by priests, the cavalry moved on, endless lines of them, and the sad trumpet's peal was echoed by steel cuirasses clashing and the clanging of armor and sabres. One by one the ambulances creaked up the street from the Porte Rouge, one by one the stretchers passed. Every house received its load of wounded. Every house hoisted the Red Cross.

Yolette and Hilde helped the soldiers strap on the floor; all the rooms on the ground floor were taken, and the wounded lay there side by side, half frozen, pale as corpses. There were a few French among them, some blond fellows, starting at everybody with mild blue eyes. One of them, a mere boy, watched Hilde as she moved about with cups of hot brandy, silently waiting his turn—which never came, for he died without a sound before she reached his bed.

It was late in the afternoon when the surgeons came. Hilde and Yolette gave up their places to some sad-eyed Sisters of Mercy. Bourke insisted that they should go to Harwood's room on the floor above. They always excepted M. Renan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December 31 he wandered about the sombre boulevards, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all aglitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand hotel a sick man and a few little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hilde. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tin box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the bells, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and whatever she thought of, she thought of Bourke and said her prayers for France and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hilde, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice.

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, intercede for papa who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the army of the Loire."

"General," whispered Hilde. The child rose from her knees; Hilde drew her into the bed and warmed the little body against her own. The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. A few later the battalions of the Four-Jour passed in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hilde. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Yes, little one."

"Was it our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fell at the city hundreds and hundreds of you ago?"

"I don't know," said Hilde faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about St. Genevieve and about St. Hilde of Carhaix."

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mlle. Hilde?"

"Since he went away."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Beginning of the End.

The knocking was repeated; Hilde sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

"It came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

"We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Fort Rouge."

Hilde sprang from her bed, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came downstairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining room, for there was no other means of illumination. The hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside the street was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering in the frosty dawn. Already a Red Cross flag hung over the doorsteps, its soiled folds floating lazily with every lev air current.

When the first stretcher appeared, borne by priests, the cavalry moved on, endless lines of them, and the sad trumpet's peal was echoed by steel cuirasses clashing and the clanging of armor and sabres. One by one the ambulances creaked up the street from the Porte Rouge, one by one the stretchers passed. Every house received its load of wounded. Every house hoisted the Red Cross.

Yolette and Hilde helped the soldiers strap on the floor; all the rooms on the ground floor were taken, and the wounded lay there side by side, half frozen, pale as corpses. There were a few French among them, some blond fellows, starting at everybody with mild blue eyes. One of them, a mere boy, watched Hilde as she moved about with cups of hot brandy, silently waiting his turn—which never came, for he died without a sound before she reached his bed.

It was late in the afternoon when the surgeons came. Hilde and Yolette gave up their places to some sad-eyed Sisters of Mercy. Bourke insisted that they should go to Harwood's room on the floor above. They always excepted M. Renan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December 31 he wandered about the sombre boulevards, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all aglitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand hotel a sick man and a few little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hilde. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tin box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the bells, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and whatever she thought of, she thought of Bourke and said her prayers for France and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hilde, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice.

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, intercede for papa who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the army of the Loire."

"General," whispered Hilde. The child rose from her knees; Hilde drew her into the bed and warmed the little body against her own. The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. A few later the battalions of the Four-Jour passed in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hilde. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Yes, little one."

"Was it our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fell at the city hundreds and hundreds of you ago?"

"I don't know," said Hilde faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about St. Genevieve and about St. Hilde of Carhaix."

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mlle. Hilde?"

"Since he went away."

The child's arms sought Hilde's neck; they fastened on her hair.

"Hear the cannon! Whispered the child; "they are very loud tonight. Do you think our Lord Jesus is listening to the cannon?"

Hilde did not reply. The child spoke again, as though to herself:

"I am somewhat up there near the stars, you know. The cannon cannot hurt Him. He is sorry for us when we are cold and when the Prussians shoot our fathers. When we sin He is sorry, for we go to hell unless—unless—"

"Hush," murmured Hilde, "sleep little one." The child whispered.

"Mlle. Hilde, I cannot sleep, because you are crying."

"Hush," said Hilde, "those who weep are sometimes pardoned."

"Have you sinned?" asked the child innocently.

"St. Hilde of Carhaix, witness for me! I do not know," sobbed Hilde. O, God! O, God!—to have him back!—only to have him back!"

"There is some one knocking," said the child.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Beginning of the End.

The knocking was repeated; Hilde sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

"Who is it?" she asked, trying to steady her voice.

"It came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

"We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Fort Rouge."

Hilde sprang from her bed, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came downstairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining room, for there was no other means of illumination. The hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside the street was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering