



CHICKAMAUGA.

By Captain F. A. MITCHELL.

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"I await your orders, general." "Colonel," added the general, turning upon him a kindly, approving eye, "there are a number to be rewarded for today's work, among them yourself. If we get safely out of this, I shall make a suitable acknowledgment of your services."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

The battle of Chickamauga is over. The Army of the Cumberland has withdrawn to Chattanooga, safe for the present at least behind breastworks. Their enemies are looking down upon them from the heights that encircle the town, awaiting for them to fall an easy prey through starvation. Colonel Maynard is awaiting the result of army red taps in the matter of his court martial. The papers in the case were lost in the rout of the right and were forgotten in his efforts to save the left. At any rate, no one seemed to care anything about them. Jakey and Jennie had ridden from the battlefield, each behind a cavalryman.

One morning an orderly came to Colonel Maynard's tent and showed him a letter postmarked County Cavan, Ireland, and addressed to the man who had assisted in the escape of Caroline Fitz Hugh. But there were features of the address which led Maynard to doubt if it was not for some other Ratigan.

Maynard determined to go in quest of Ratigan's body, or Ratigan himself, if he were not dead, taking the letter with him. He made a request for a "flag of truce," which was granted, and the next morning, after an early breakfast, Colonel Maynard, accompanied by Jakey and the little girl, whom Maynard hoped to restore to her parents, each mounted and all attended by a lieutenant and 20 men, set out from Chattanooga toward Mission Ridge. They met the enemy's pickets at the base of the ridge and were conducted to Rossville. Colonel Maynard at once requested that he might be accorded an interview with Colonel Fitz Hugh, if that officer survived the battle. A messenger was sent to summon him, and as he had some miles to go "the flag" party dismounted, were taken into a house, where they awaited the officer's arrival. Every attention was shown them, and they were made as comfortable as possible. Two hours after the departure of the courier Colonel Fitz Hugh rode up to the door.

There was always a certain embarrassment between these two men, which under the circumstances was quite natural, but which was heightened by the habitual dignity with which Fitz Hugh bore himself. There was much to force them apart and much to draw them together, but it all resulted in constraint. Fitz Hugh lifted his hat to Maynard, then advanced and put out his hand. Neither seemed to think of appropriate words of greeting, and there were a few moments of silence, which were broken by Maynard referring to his mission.

"Colonel," he said, "I am the bearer of a letter for Corporal Ratigan, though the superscription gives a different title than corporal—the man who assisted me on the mission which you doubtless well remember. I saw Ratigan fall from his horse and suppose that he is dead. Am I right?"

"No, sir. Corporal Ratigan lives. He was severely wounded by a shot from your men. He managed to keep his saddle till his work was accomplished, when he fainted through loss of blood. For a time his life hung in the balance. We now hope for his recovery."

"I am rejoiced to hear it. Perhaps this letter is for him. Will you attend to its delivery?"

"If you will ride with me to Ringold, where he lies, you can deliver it in person."

"That would indeed be a pleasure. Can you get permission to take me so far within your lines?"

"I can try."

"In that case I may look, by the way, for the home of this little girl. I rescued her from the battlefield, where she was lost."

Colonel Maynard was required to give his parole not to use any information he might acquire on the way and was permitted to go forward.

It was a singular party that crisp October morning, cantering down the Chattanooga and Lafayette road, the recent bone of contention, toward the now deserted battlefield. Maynard and Fitz Hugh rode together at the front. Then came Jakey and Jennie, both mounted like the rest, while a troop of Confederate cavalry formed the escort. The two colonels talked on everything except what was uppermost in their minds. Fitz Hugh several times attempted to guide the conversation upon Maynard's service to his sister in order that he might make a proper acknowledgment, but Maynard, foreseeing his intention, always made some remark by way of thwarting him.

"My pop lives down thar," said Jennie, pointing to a cabin a mile below them.

They were approaching the "horse-shoe"

Leaving the Chattanooga road, they followed another leading around the ridge, soon striking a third leading to Reed's bridge. When they came to the house pointed out by Jennie, a man was sitting on the fence, or one section of it which happened not to have been taken for firewood like the rest, whittling a stick. Catching sight of the child as the party rode up, he went to her, and taking her in his arms covered her with kisses. The mother, hearing the exclamations, rushed out and repeated the father's caresses.

The parents expressed as well as they were able and in their humble way their thanks to the rescuer of their child, and the party proceeded on their way.

"Goodby, Jennie," said her friend Jakey as he rode off.

"Goodby."

"Ef ye'll write me a letter, I'll make y' a doll outen a cornob. I know how ter make 'em."

"I can't write."

"Waal, I'll do it anyhow. Yer a purty nice young un ef y' air only a gal."

Riding over Reed's bridge, the party passed through the gap in the ridge beyond, and descending the east slope soon struck a road leading to Ringold. They rode into the town about noon and soon drew rein before the house where Corporal Ratigan lay wounded. Fitz Hugh and Maynard dismounted and entered together, Jakey bringing up the rear. In the hallway, her eyes large with astonishment at seeing her brother in company with Colonel Maynard, stood Caroline Fitz Hugh.

If the brother had failed in expressing his thanks to Maynard, the sister succeeded, but not by words. She grasped Maynard's hand, when suddenly, for the first time since her escape, a full realizing sense of the terrible end she had so narrowly escaped swept over her. She was looking her gratitude, with all the intensity of her expressive eyes, when her formal brother said:

"Caroline, Colonel Maynard suffered disgrace on your account. It is proper you should know how much we owe him."

This information was too much for even the strong nature of so resolute a woman. She burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"For the first time since it occurred," said Maynard gently, "I am satisfied with my act. What is the opinion of men to me beside the consciousness of having served so admirable a woman?"

Fitz Hugh threw open a door near by and led the way through it into a room where Corporal Ratigan, his ruddy locks contrasting with his pale face and the whiteness of his pillow, looked at them with the same astonishment as Miss Fitz Hugh.

"Why, colonel," he exclaimed, "are ye a prisoner?"

"No. I came by the courtesy of Colonel Fitz Hugh to deliver this letter, which I think is for you. Are you Hugh Ratigan?"

"O' am."

"Sir Hugh Ratigan?"

"No; me father was Sir Thomas Ratigan of County Cavan, Ireland."

"Perhaps there have been changes," and Maynard handed him the letter.

The corporal took it and looked first at the black seal and then at the handwriting, which he recognized at once as his mother's, and read, "To Sir Hugh Ratigan, United States Army, Tennessee, U. S. A."

"Me brother is dead," he said solemnly and then tore open the envelope. The letter advised him, as he supposed, of the death of his elder brother, and as the title and estates of the family descended to him he was adjured to go home and attend to his affairs.

"Is it as we supposed?" asked Maynard.

"It is. O' m' Sir Hugh true enough. Me brother, God rest 'im, is gone."

"We sympathize with you at your brother's death and rejoice with you at your own inheritance," said Fitz Hugh.

All in turn took the corporal by the hand.

"You must go home at once," said Maynard.

"How will O' go home when O' m' enlisted for three years or durin the war?"

"We'll have to get you out of that," said Maynard. "Your duties are more important in Ireland than as a corporal in our service. We have more than a plenty of men."

"I wish we could say the same," observed Colonel Fitz Hugh.

The visiting party, expecting to return that afternoon, had but little time to converse upon anything except Sir Hugh Ratigan's future, and this they considered fully. It was arranged that as soon as the baronet should be able to travel he was to go through the lines, apply for a discharge and go to Ireland. Colonel Fitz Hugh anticipated no difficulty in securing his permission to depart from the Confederacy, and as he was a British subject of rank it was not expected that he would be held to a strict accountability for the part he had taken in the escape of Caroline Fitz Hugh, especially as that act had been largely left sight of in an event of greater moment—the battle of Chickamauga. These matters once settled, the party moved toward the door, where adieus were spoken, then mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHOICE OF A POST.

Caroline Fitz Hugh had watched over Corporal Ratigan every day since his wounding, and by careful nursing had doubtless saved his life. It was not for the corporal to fall in love with his nurse, for he had loved her ever since the day he first met her. When the visiting party had left the house, she went back to her charge, and after a few words of sympathy at the loss of his brother, putting off her hand frankly, and with a smile:

"Arise, Sir Hugh," she said. "You have been on your back long enough. You must get used to sitting up and going to Ireland and to admin-

ister your estate."

"Darlin'," he said, looking up at her wistfully.

"It's time you were breaking yourself of calling me that. You must forget the Confederate 'telegraph worker,' go home and marry one of the daughters of the neighboring gentry and settle down to become a fine old Irish gentleman, one of the rare old stock."

"That's a fine picture ye're makin' for me, and what'll ye be doin' meantime?"

"Working for my country."

"And haven't ye promised ye would do no more telegraph workin'?"

"Oh, that duty has come to an abrupt termination! I shall never attempt it again. How could I after the sacrifice you and Colonel Maynard have made for me? Besides, if seen within the Federal lines, I should be recognized, and I would then deserve my fate."

"Ye'd better abandon the cause."

"Never, so long as it is a cause. So long as my brothers continue the struggle I will be with them."

"Then so long as the Union army is fightin' ye O'll be in its ranks."

"You'll do no such thing. You will go home, where your presence is more needed—to your mother, to your tenants. Ireland needs all her landowners such as you at home. That is your country. You have no interest here."

"And the United States is your country. You have no other."

"Rats!"

"Darlin'!"

There was a silence between them for some moments. Ratigan laid his hand on hers while she was looking, with a pained expression, out of the window. In her eyes was a far look. Her lover saw her troubled expression. He did not attempt to comfort her by recalling what he had said. He pushed on further:

"Darlin'," he said, "ye're right when ye say O'm needed in Ireland. Go with me, darlin'. Be me wife. Let all this intense effort, this sacrifice ye're puttin' into a cause, which O' foresee is doomed, be given to me tenants. The estate is a large one, and there are hundreds of people for ye to befriend. There ye can work to a purpose. There yer efforts in behalf of a really downtrodden people will be for good."

"And leave my brothers in the midst of this horrid struggle? I will stay here till the last gun is fired, till the last blow of the hammer has riveted our chains."

Born and bred in the south, Miss Fitz Hugh had never seen except with southern eyes. Here was a man who was giving her views never before open to her. She had a mind capable of grasping them and saw the strength, the solid sense, beneath them when properly presented.

"Darlin'," said the young baronet, "the world moves on quickly. If yer people succeed in this war, in less than a quarter of a century ye'll either free yer slaves or be a blot on the face of the earth."

"Oh, Rats," she exclaimed, "why did I ever meet you? You've sapped the strength I possessed for my work. I can never again do my duty as I have done it thus far."

"Darlin'," he said, drawing her nearer to him, "O'll replace what O've taken. O'll give ye other duties, the duties that belong to the mistress of a fine estate, the duties of a woman of high degree in a country where birth is respected far more than here. With your vigor, your strong impulses!"

"Guided by your more steady light."

"Ye may become one of the most influential women in the three kingdoms."

In her eyes came that humorous twinkle he had once seen before when she stood in her buggy in the road up in Tennessee and tantalized him for his stupidity in having been duped by her.

"It would be nice to be—"

"To be what, darlin'?"

"Lady Rats," and she hid her blushes in the pillow on which his head rested.

The sun setting over Lookout mountain shone directly in the faces of Maynard and his party as returning from Ringold they rode into Chattanooga. It was a glorious October evening, and the heights towering them, covered by unseen Confederates, reposed about the town like huge lions watching a wounded animal, confident that at last it must fall into their power.

Dismounting before his tent, Maynard entered it, and there found a letter from his wife. She begged him to come to her if it were possible, and if not to write to her. He read and reread the letter again and again, and then made an attempt at a reply. After writing half a dozen, all of which he tore up, he abandoned the task in despair. His position was too uncertain. The sentence of the court martial hung over him like a sullen cloud. What could he say to her to comfort her? He well knew that the only comforting she needed was to know that he was not miserable, and of that he could not assure her.

And so matters hung for a week. Having no duties to perform, the time passed all the more slowly. The Confederates were sending occasional shells from Lookout mountain, and as they were harmless the reports were something of a relief to Maynard, breaking the monotony of the silence. He spent much of the time thinking of what he would do in case the sentence of the court were approved and carried into effect. He formed many plans, which were all abandoned. At last he settled down to the resolve that he would go to the army in the east, enlist under an assumed name and await the coming of some missile to end his career, as he had intended at Chickamauga.

One morning an orderly rode up to him and handed him an order to report in person at General Thomas' headquarters. Calling for his horse and for his own orderly, Jakey, to follow, he mounted, and in a feverish mood darted away to obey the order.

What did the summons mean? Something definite in his affairs had come about; that he felt reasonably sure of.

Perhaps the papers of the court in his case had been found. Perhaps they had been made out in duplicate. The latter supposition was the most likely. His offense could not be ignored. Indeed he could not afford to have it ignored. The sentence must be either set aside or carried into effect. Dismissal would be far more desirable than living in suspense.

All these matters rushed through his mind while he rode to respond to the summons. The nearer he drew to headquarters the less hopeful he became. After all, was it not absurd to expect anything except that new papers had been made, the sentence forwarded "approved," and he was now to be informed that he was no longer in the army? General Thomas could do much for him, but there was not a general in the army who had a higher sense of a soldier's obligations than he. How was it possible that so great a leader, so rigid a disciplinarian, one with such high conceptions, could do aught in his case but approve the sentence? And now he was sending for him to inform him of his degradation.

Following this reasoning, by the time he arrived at headquarters his expectations were at the lowest ebb. He dismounted, and so preoccupied was he that he left his horse standing without fastening her, but Jakey rode forward and seized the rein. Maynard gave his name to an orderly and in a few minutes stood before the man whose very presence was quite sufficient to strike terror into the heart of a delinquent.

But the first face on which Maynard's eyes rested was not that of the general. Another was there to greet him, one who, he knew, whether he were honored or disgraced, would never love him the less. It was his wife. The thought flashed through his brain, "She is here to comfort me when the blow falls." He wanted to fly to her embrace. The impulse was checked. He saw that she burned to fly to him, but she, too, restrained herself, for there, between them, towered the figure of the general. Maynard gave him a quick glance, but could discover nothing in his countenance to indicate what his fate would be. These glances, these surmises, lasted but for a moment, for the general spoke:

"I have sent for you to inform you of your status in the army."

Maynard bowed his head and waited.

"The offense for which you were tried," the general spoke slowly and impressively, "was too grievous to be overlooked. It would have pleased me in the case of so brave a man to set it aside, but such a course would have condoned that which, if it should go unpunished, would strike at the very foundation of military discipline. In liberating a spy intrusted to your care you violated a sacred trust and assumed an authority such as is not accorded to any one save the president of the United States."

Maynard did not raise his eyes from the ground. He knew what was coming, and a shiver passed over him.

"A new set of papers were prepared and sent to me. I forwarded them—"

Maynard's eyes were almost starting from their sockets.

"With my approval."

"Oh, general!" gasped the stricken man, catching at the tent pole for a support. Laura could with difficulty keep her seat, so eager was she to fly to him.

"They have also been approved by the president, and you have been dismissed from the service of the United States, with forfeiture of all pay and emoluments."

Maynard tried to speak. He wished to say that he could not complain of the sentence—that, considering the offense, it was merciful—but his tongue would not obey him.

"So much for your punishment," the general went on after a slight pause.

"There are other matters, however, to be considered. These are your youth, the circumstances under which you were placed, the voluntary sacrifice of yourself made to save another and in obedience to your own interpretation of your duty in repaying a sacred obligation. While these considerations do not destroy the act or its pernicious effect as an example, they show conclusively that it did not spring from base motives, but rather in obedience to a strong sense of honor, which a soldier should hold in highest esteem."

When the general began to speak of these palliating circumstances, Maynard did not hear him. As he proceeded, however, his attention was arrested.

"Furthermore, there are your brilliant services, both as a scout and yet more recently in the battle through which we have just passed. I have taken pains to learn of your services in the ranks on the 19th of September and was myself a witness to your gallantry on the ridge on the 20th. I cannot find it in my heart to fail in my acknowledgments to any man, however he may have erred, who engaged in that desperate struggle, which was a turning point in our fortune and may be said to have saved us all from rout or capture."

"Besides for more than a year I have watched your career with interest. I am sure that you are possessed of undoubted military talents, perhaps of a high order. I believe it to be true wisdom on the part of the government to retain those talents for the country. Therefore, in the interest of the United States and for gallant and meritorious conduct at the battle of Chickamauga, I have suggested your name to the president for the appointment of brigadier general of volunteers. A batch of such appointments, including yours, was yesterday sent to the senate, and I have a telegram announcing that they were all confirmed."

Suddenly it seemed as if there had been a loosening of invisible cords that had been holding husband and wife apart. In the fraction of a second they were looked in each other's arms. Tears, the usual mode of expression of deep feeling in woman, did not come only to the wife. Yet in a measure the axes were reversed. Laura was more smiles than

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ears. Maynard only wept. Soon remembering in whose presence he stood, Maynard disengaged himself. Turning to General Thomas: "General," he said in a broken voice, "I cannot—thanks are nothing—time must show how well I appreciate what you have done. Is there another man in the army who could afford to take so enlarged a view in such a case? Is there one with so farseeing an eye, so keen a sense of a soldier's duty, tempered with so kind a heart?"

Maynard paused for a moment. Then with a sudden burst of enthusiasm: "But who shall reward the man who on that terrible day held together the Army of the Cumberland? Can the president bestow an adequate rank? Would the title of full 'general' avail? No! It is for the people to reward you with a title, not given by an individual, but by the common consent of vast masses—not only for a day, but so long as there shall be a history of this war—the Rock of Chickamauga."

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