

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER IV.

The war cloud had burst in tempest and raged itself to stillness; England breathed freely once more. For two weary years of humiliation and exultation, of indignation and mourning, of sorrow and pride filled the land. There were vacant places at many a pleasant hearth, desolate homes, fatherless children, age bereaved and strong youth hopelessly crippled, but there was peace at last. The sword of England, the army, had been tested and found wanting; the material was excellent, but the organization vile, and what avails a sword of finest temper without a skilled hand to wield it? Yet this splendid sword reaped laurels.

The first swallows came about Stillbrooke Mill bearing this gentle message on their wings. Mrs. Meade shed tears of joy on learning the news one bright morning, then instantly began to make grand household preparations for Philip's reception. Mr. Meade went out into the garden, where everything seemed to be putting forth its strength and beauty to welcome the returning exile. He went to stick a row of young peas with a slow smile deepening the numerous wrinkles about his mouth, while Jessie flitted about the sunny garden, tangling the sunbeams in her flowing hair, gathering spring flowers and singing patriotic songs in her bird-like voice.

Phil'll never know the little maid she's shot up that tall and slim," he thought.

News did not travel so rapidly then as now; war correspondents then only began to be; papers were fewer, dearer, and less accurate and well-informed than now, rumors from private sources circulated vaguely and inaccurately. It was terrible to the Meades to hear of Alma and then wait in long suspense ignorant of Philip's fate, the more so as Mr. Ingleby's brother fell in that action, and his name was duly reported with so many nameless rank and file of his and of Philip's regiment among the killed. Balaclava and Inkerman brought the same sickening doubt, and the Meades wrote letters which seemed ghastly in the light of that uncertainty to one might be lying dead on those battle-fields.

The wound which Philip received at Inkerman, and his subsequent hospital troubles left them longer in doubt; but once satisfied that he was recovering, the winter hardships did not cause them so much anxiety, especially as the accounts of those hardships were to a certain extent discredited in England and Philip made light of them in his letters, so that by the time the summer came his parents were sufficiently case-hardened to think of other things than the war, and were disposed rather to under-rate the perils and privations of the long siege of Sebastopol.

When the oaks were exchanging their tints of dull crimson, russet, and warm gold for the pure, fresh, pale green of full leafage at the meeting of May and June, the whole country echoed with clashing bells and booming guns; the larger towns blazed at night with such illuminations as the limited resources of those bygone days permitted, and even the sober bourgeois of Clevee filled their windows with candles, lit bonfires and otherwise recklessly comforted themselves.

"Matt Meade's doing it handsome" said a portly citizen at shut at eve, on the feast day, as he passed the mill with a companion. "And he came down smartly for the town decorations. He's reckoned a warm man, is Matt, though they do say he's dipped pretty heavy in mines and other speculations."

"Not he. You may warrant Matt Meade knows what he's about," returned Mr. Cheeseman, now an alderman. "You'll have to get up early to catch him asleep. He's warmer than anybody knows. Scraps and hoards for young scapegrace. 'Tis rough on the girl, but she'll be a catch by and by after all, trust me if she isn't."

Holly groups crossed and recrossed the bridge, glancing at the illuminated mill as they went; loungers leant on the parapet, where the lamp stanchions were twined with laurel, to criticise Miller Meade's patriotic lamps and candles, and the Chinese lanterns swinging from the trees; amongst these idlers was a fine young man, whose trim moustache, erect carriage, and short, well-brushed hair, stamped him in the eyes of bystanders as a military officer.

"You are gay here to-night," said the stranger, lounging at the end of the parapet, to the man in charge of the horses.

"We be gay, sir," replied the man; "there bait a man on this blessed place to-night, indoors or out, excepting me and Sarah, the seragoman, and when I've raked up, there won't be only she left."

"The family gone out to see the sights?"

"Aye, they be all gone up top of town, to see em light the big bonfire

Terrible fine doings, to be sure! They do say as London itself can't beat Clevee for lighting up and general loyalty. I never see nothin' like it afore in all my barn days. And I reckon 'tis nothin' but bright now we've done for Wold Nick and put an end to this yer Rooshian job."

"Had you any friends in the East?" the officer asked.

"Well there! there's my master, he'd a got a boy there; couldn't do nothin' with en at home. But darnee they wild us never comes to no harm. Then there was my brother Jim, he got hisself knocked on the head at Balaclava, the Roosins pretty soon done for he. A smartish chap a was."

"And the good-for-nothing escaped?" asked the officer.

"When I says good-for-nothing, I don't know as a was a bad un drough and drough," continued the serving-man, "I never had nothin' to say agen en. He's coming home to-morrow, hrose to be a officer, they say. I reckon this yer town won't be gig enough to hold en."

"Conceited?"

"Well, there, 't was like this yer, he was rared above his vittles. He wouldn't bide nowhere. Master bound en to a lawyer. A wouldn't bide long with he. Then a bound to wold Dr. Maule, and darned if a didn't knock the wold chap down one night. Then a goes out in street and knocks the parson down and gets hisself penned up in station. Master he thinks he med so well knock Rooshians down while he's about it, so a sends en off to the war. Miserable wild chap! Good night, sir, and thankee."

"Miserable wild chap!" laughed the officer to himself, as he strolled up and down and looked thoughtfully at the homely mill and house so strangely transformed by the festal lights.

He knew so well which way they would come in, not by the front door, but round by the lilac bushes to the kitchen, at the door of which stood Sarah looking up at the rain of rockets in the sky. Swift as a thought he glided round, unobserved by the servant, and then as they approached, stepped tranquilly forth to meet them.

"Sir," exclaimed the miller, stopping short when he saw him with something between defiance and welcome, "what might you be pleased to want?"

"Don't you—don't you know me?" faltered Philip with a hot pain in his eyes.

Jessie gave a little cry of delighted surprise, and Mrs. Meade rushed forward and clasped the stranger in her arms.

"Lord ha mercy!" exclaimed her husband at intervals, "this can't be Philip. Why, bless the boy," he added when his mother and sister had duly welcomed him, "Sir Arthur Medway could not have bred up a finer gentleman than he's made of himself."

There was little sleep at the mill that night, so much had to be related on both sides, but especially on Philip's; the dawn stole in through the parlor window and made the candle-light pale, before anyone of going to bed.

"If you had but been a cavalry-soldier, Philip," Jessie said, "you might have been one of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, like Mr. Medway."

"Aye, and finely cockered up is young Mr. Medway," said Matthew, "enough to turn any young fellow's head."

"Lucky fellow! to be in that," Philip said. "Jessie, I have brought you a pet and one for father."

Mr. Meade's pet was a Russian poodle, a ma's of black wool, with little beady eyes invisible beneath the long fell falling over its face. Jessie's an iron-gray cat on three legs, with one eye missing, a scarred body, and the worst temper ever known in a cat.

She would have liked Philip to relate his Crimean adventures from morning till night, they never tired her.

Sometimes of an evening in the garden while Mr. Meade smoked, Mrs. Meade and Jessie were busy with their needles, and perhaps a neighbor had dropped in, and Philip was gradually beguiled into Crimean reminiscences, he was startled by the intensity of Jessie's absorbed blue eyes upon him, as she motionless in the background, her work lying forgotten in her lap, her slender hands clasped, her thoughts far away on battle-fields or among the hazards and horrors of the icy winter siege.

There was a magnetism in the intent dream-hazed face which insensibly stole Philip's memories from him until he too forgot himself and wandered mentally among those past scenes, reproducing them almost involuntarily like one in a magnetic sleep. Balaclava was Jessie's favorite battle. Philip had seen something of the charge of the six hundred, and heard more of Claude Medway's gallant deed in entering the deadly defile a second time to rescue a wounded trooper under the fierce

fire. The grand charge of the heavy brigade appealed less to her imagination, and Philip had not seen anything of the Russian cavalry charge and its splendor repulse by the Ninety-third Highlanders, the redoubtable "thin red line."

"I don't know, Mr. Randal," observed Mr. Cheeseman, the corn-dealer, during one of these social evenings, "that I should care myself to go into battle. Shouldn't like the feel of cold steel in my inside. And when my time comes, I should like it all done proper on my bed, doctors and nurses and clegymen, and a respectable funeral at the end. I can't abide being hurried; never could. Somehow it don't seem decent to go out of the world in such a dence of a hurry. Our family always died respectable in their beds and left everything regular down to the last furthing and the hatbands. Now I dare say you went into Alma as bold as a lion and took no more notice of cannonballs flying about than if they'd been snowflakes. I should a turned as white as the stem of this pipe."

"I don't know what color I turned, Mr. Cheeseman," replied Philip, "but I do know that I felt awfully queer that day when we crossed the Alma. I had never been under fire before, and it is a precious queer feeling. I can tell you. When the enemy opened fire from the heights we began to advance. My knees shook, and there was a sound like the sea in my ears. I seemed to see them all at home and know what they were doing at the moment, and I remembered everything I had ever done. We marched into a confusion of roaring cannon, rattling musketry, galloping aides, clouds of smoke and dust with flashes of fire and gleams of steel between; we had a general sense of moving masses, like the moving of the sea. While we were advancing I was all right, quite happy. Then we halted and I felt queer and shivery again. There we stood for a good hour, and the battle came surging gradually upon us like a great sea-wave. A laughing Irishman next me was twitting me with being afraid, when he fell-shot dead at my feet, the smile still on his face and his blood splashing over me. Soon the fire was so hot that we shifted out of range. Just then our colonel rode down the ranks, pale, and with his bride-hand quivering, brave man as he was and proved himself there. He bid us stand firm a little longer; while he was speaking, a shot rolled him and his charger together in the dust. He was soon on his feet and finished his speech, only the horse was killed. Then at last we advanced under fire of a battery, holding our own fire. The moment was like a drink of wine to us, it gave us new life. By this time I knew all the different sounds of the different kinds of shot and shell, and started at nothing. At last the order to fire came and we went mad I suppose for I remember nothing after the first splendid excitement but a hurly-hurly of smoke and shot and the gleam of bayonets, sabres, and men's eyes. Then gradually through the thunder of guns and quick crack of muskets pierced bugle calls, words of command, shrieks of horses, groans of men unheard before. Then English cheers and French shouts became more frequent, battery after battery was silenced, and before evening we were firing at the Russians' backs, and stumbling over the arms they threw away as they ran."

"And so the battle of the Alma was won after four hours' fighting," added Mr. Meade. "'Twas a September 26, 1854, a fine sunny autumn day. Jessie was out blackberrying."

"Dear heart, yes," added Mrs. Meade; "and toward night it thundered and made me think of Russian guns. Balaclava day was later. Thee's elderberry wine now, I made that day; walnuts were turning ripe, and there was a dallia show in Marwell Park. Mr. Ingleby was there, and his brother lying dead on the field and Mr. Medway badly wounded."

"Victory's a fine thing," said Mr. Cheeseman, settling himself cozily in his chair in the sunshine, "though I'd as soon lose as win, I reckon, if I'd run my head agen a cannon-ball. I'll warrant you slept well after Alma, Mr. Randal."

"We did, Mr. Cheeseman. But you wouldn't sleep to-night, Jessie, if I told you what the field looked like. We lost three officers that day, our whole force only lost twenty-six, and our ranks were terribly cut up. After all, the roll-call is the worst part of an engagement. It turns you sick to hear name after name and no answer."

"And were you as frightened at Balaclava, Philip?" Jessie asked with some disdain.

"No, Miss Fire-Eater," he replied with a grave smile; "but I never have and never shall go into action without horror and dread, though one feels a terrible joy in the thick of it. Wait till you hear a wounded horse cry, Jessie. And that is a small part of the horror of war."

"Why not sell out and settle to business, young sir, if you don't like war?" suggested Mr. Cheeseman.

"The very reason not to sell out, Mr. Cheeseman; why a soldier's chief duty is to promote peace."

"Well now, Phil, that's a queer notion," objected Mr. Meade.

"Besides, my dear," added Mrs. Meade, bewildered, "how can you love your enemies when you shoot them?"

"Why, that makes us love them all the better, mother. You always like a fellow you've licked. And you only care to fight good fellows. Those Russians are splendid fellows, much finer soldiers than the French.

Well worth licking they are."

"Well! I don't know but I'd as soon you didn't take a fancy to me, if that's how you show it," commented Mr. Cheeseman.

"But it was our duty to fight the Russians and theirs to defend their country," contended Philip; "so how could there be bad blood between us. Why, mother, one day in some public gardens, I heard a Russian cavalry officer on crutches with a bandaged head, ask an Englishman in plain clothes to what regiment some Highlanders belonged. 'To the Ninety-third Highlanders, my own,' he replied. 'Then sir,' said the wounded Russian, 'permit me the honor of shaking hands with you. I belonged to the brigade of cavalry whose charge you repulsed so grandly at Balaclava. I had the honor of being wounded in that charge. I at once recognized the uniform.' Now, mother, if that isn't loving an enemy, I don't know what is."

Philip's cheek glowed as he spoke, he looked at Jessie, who turned away, her eyes full of tears, a sense of the chivalry of war and the grandeur of human emotion rushing over her like a billow.

Mr. Cheeseman left; and Philip was moved by the electric glance of Jessie's tear-bright eyes; his heart went out to her. He drew her on to his knee and passed his hand through the waves of her bright falling hair, and her beauty, which he had hitherto enjoyed without considering, like sunshine and field-flowers, suddenly became apparent to him as something distinctive, full of promise for the future.

"And pray, miss, what do you learn at Miss Blushford's," he asked, "besides spelling and needlework?"

"Manners," Jessie returned, demurely.

"She will be a woman soon," he said, half to himself, while his thoughts vainly strove to fashion some future for her.

"Turned fifteen," added Mr. Meade, with tranquil contentment, "knows French and most things."

It was a time of intense happiness and pride to him, the happiest time he had ever known; though, on the whole, as he had told his wife, he had had a happy life.

His heart swelled with love and pride whenever his eyes rested on Philip and Jessie; such a pair, he thought, could not be matched. He had reared the boy to be a gentleman, and there he stood, tall, straight, and strong, looking so distinguished in comparison with the simple burghers of Clevee, not only an "officer and gentleman," but a full-blown hero with medalled breast and a halo of glory, little lion to Clevee, feted and made much of. This lionizing, together with Mr. Meade's undisguised pride and desire to show him off, would have been a trial to any youth not wholly destitute of modesty, or of that keen dislike to make one's self ridiculous which so often does duty for that gracious quality, and was sometimes little short of an affliction to Philip, who, as his adopted father dimly perceived, had inherited fine instincts.

He joined in their homely talk, till Jessie and her mother went in-doors and Matthew rose in the warm light that now fell from the cloudless summer moon, and stretched himself with an air of content, meaning to follow them. But Philip, who had been silent and pensive for a while, detained him. "Father," he said hurriedly, "I am of age. I ought to know now who and what I am."

"You're a officer in Her Majesty's army, a gentleman born, a gentleman by profession, and a gentleman by act, and a credit to them that reared you," replied Mr. Meade. "If I was you I wouldn't ask no more."

"You told me to wait till I came of age and I waited," Philip persisted.

"Look her, Phil," said Mr. Meade. "It's like this. Everything is pleasant; your mother and me is glad to have you home safe and sound after the war; 'tis like one of them warm spells in the fall; it can't last. Let's enjoy ourselves while the Lord gives us the chance."

"Then it is very bad?"

Mr. Meade paused awhile, his unwonted flow of speech deserting him, then replied, slowly: "Family things is like this, they stir folk up in their feelings—and there's by-gones—let sleeping dogs lie, say I."

"I ought to know my true position it may influence my actions," urged Philip.

"It won't do that, Phil, I can answer for that. I'm bound to tell ye, my boy, I knows, that well enough. But wait a bit longer, say six months. It's nothing but right you should know somethen. There's happy times for most of us," he added, earnestly, his gray eyes deepening and his homely figure taking on dignity, "but they're none too plentiful. We mustn't look for them. We've had trouble and care, Heaven knows, and it do seem ungrateful when the Almighty as plain as tells us to be quiet and comfortable for we to go and stir up things has been laid by for years and years and no harm done. Who knows but trouble may be nigh."

Philip was silent; he felt that he must respect this mood, but he wished to be reassured on one subject. He had recently been informed by a local banker that a small capital of several hundred pounds had been placed to his account by an anonymous person, and he required of Mr. Meade to tell him if he knew whence this came.

Mr. Meade thought he could give a pretty shrewd guess, he replied, with a twinkle in his eye, and on being further questioned, assured him that

in taking the money he was taking the due of no one else and in no way injuring another; that the source of the money was strictly honorable and such as he would in nowise ever regret or wish under any circumstances to repudiate.

With these assurances Philip was content, and the remainder of his leave sped in untroubled happiness. There were boating excursions and hay-makings. Cousin Jane and her family came to Stillbrooke, and the miller's family passed long sunny afternoons at Redwood's Farm. There were pleasant, long-drawn twilight in the garden when the day's work was done, long chats between whistles while the miller leant over his half-door at the mill and Philip lounged outside with his pipe and the throb of the wheel and hushing rustle of the water made soft music. There was pride and pleasure at seeing the lad made much of. Perhaps there was a little jealous fear in Mr. Meade's anxiety to hear how Philip had fared at Marwell, where he dined and slept; Claude Medway, who had renewed the boyish acquaintance in the Crimea, being at the court just then. Jessie, too, showed great interest in this visit, and liked to hear Philip's generous boyish enthusiasm for the older Claude, who had displayed a dashing almost reckless bravery on many occasions, a gay and thoughtless daring on which the more imaginative and therefore sensitive Philip loved to dwell.

"Yes, Medway is a fine officer, and a good fellow," he said one day, "fast, but then those hussars do go the pace."

"What is fast, Philip?" asked Jessie, and Philip only pinched her delicate ear and laughed. He was very sorry when the time came to bid good-by, and the way in which she clung to him with little cries of "Ippie, Ippie," at parting haunted him for days.

(To be Continued.)

BETTER GROW BEARDS.

Distance a Man Shaves in An Average Lifetime.

If when you meet your moustache adorned friend you tell him he shaves 5 feet 8 inches a day, or over two fifths of a mile a year, he will probably accuse you of romancing, but such is nevertheless a fact. The distance a man shaves in an average lifetime, or the distance his razor travels over his face, will be a surprise to most people. It, of course, differs to a more or less extent with each individual, firstly, on account of personal taste, which determines whether a man wears partial or full whiskers with or without a moustache, or is altogether clean shaven.

Secondly, it differs to a fractional extent, for the following reasons:—The measurement of the faces of two individuals is never exactly alike. The texture of people's skins, and the strength of the growth of hair on the face differ just as widely, and it is the tenderness or stoutness of the skin and the strength or weakness of the growth of hair that decides how many times a man passes a razor over his face.

From a multitude of examples an average measurement around the chin from ear to ear is found to be 12½ inches. From where the beard starts on the throat to the chin, and thence to the edge of the under lip, is 4½ inches. You must reckon that it is necessary to give two strokes of the razor to each inch or fraction of an inch in order to cover all the surface; and to go over each section of the face twice in order to secure a clean surface.

So multiplying the number of strokes by the number of times the razor is passed over the entire face, you get the figure four, and four times the two above mentioned measurements gives you the figures of 50 and 18 respectively, which added together produce 68. Therefore, the average man, whether dark or fair, shaves 68 inches once every 24 hours.

Vital statistics on the subject of the duration of men's lives are misleading, by reason of the fact all who die in infancy are included, and enormously lower the average. It is, therefore, better to fall back on the Psalmist's estimate of three scores years and ten—or 70 years—in order to arrive at the life of the average male adult. With these figures we arrive at the result that every man wearing only a moustache shaves 2,068 feet 4 inches per year.

Taking, then, the average life at 70 years and that the fair man begins shaving at 18 and the dark man earlier, we have the following results. That a fair man, if he lives till he is 70, will shave in the course of his life 20 miles 651 yards 4 inches. The dark man, if he lives till he is 70 will shave in the course of his life 20 miles 1,340 yards 1 foot, 8 inches.

Like many other boys who have risen to eminence, Lord Charles Bessford was the despair of both his parents and teachers. On his thirteenth birthday the choice of a calling was put before young Bessford by his father asking him whether he would enter the Army or the Navy or take up orders. "Well," he concluded, "what is it to be?" "The Navy," was Bessford's immature reply. "And why the Navy boy?" pursued the father. "I'd like to be an admiral, like Nelson." "Pshaw! Like Nelson! Why Nelson?" "Because I want to." "But even if you were to join the Navy why do you think you will ever be come an admiral?" "Because mean to," was the curt and emphatic reply.