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THE RIVAL.

By the Author of "Recollections of the Peninsula."

(CONCLUDED.)

CHAPTER VII.

"This is no theatre where hope abides,
The dull thick noise of war alone stirs here;
And Love himself as he were arm'd in steel,
Steps forth and girds him for the strife of death."

WALLENSTEIN.

When Ernest was shaken by the shoulder, at one o'clock in the morning, to take his tour of duty on the walls, he arose lighter and happier, and more refreshed, than he had done for many days past. The image of the old soldier whom he had seen so placidly die yesterday—the evident conviction on the man's mind that he was going to a state of peace and rest—acted more powerfully upon Ernest than any thing connected with a future state of being of which he had read or heard, out of Scripture. The shadowy illusiveness of things present—the abiding, substantial reality of things to come, forced themselves upon his serious consideration. He had some distance to walk alone to the ramparts, and then several hundred yards upon them, before he gained his post, quite alone, having only to pass the sentries. The night was rather dark, but beautiful and still. The streets were still—the houses asleep. The reserve picquets of the night in the place d'armes, and on the esplanade near the walls, lay slumbering on their arms. *"Qui vive?" "Qui vive?"* were the only words which from time to time, roused him as he passed the post of a sentinel; but there was one heavy sound that, at brief intervals, broke the given silence of the night with loud and busy violence; and, leaning over the parapet, you could see the breaching-battery of the English open its red mouths momently, flashing angry amid the gloom. As he came near the breach, he could both hear and see where the heavy shot shook and shattered the broken wall, the stones and rubbish of which fell heaped and ruinons on the outer face of it.

In those longer pauses, during which the British suffered their guns to cool, he carefully reconnoitred it, and gave a report that it would be practicable on the morrow. By direction of the governor, a working party was now employed in cutting off the breaches from the body of the place by a ditch and a breastwork. This labor Ernest was to overlook, as also to prepare the top of the breach for the *chevaux-de-frise*, which was to be placed there on the evening of the morrow.

"They will never make their way into the place," said Ernest, talking to himself, "with obstacles like these against them, were every man among them a lion."

"Did you never hear of the walls of Jericho?" said a voice in German, near him, which he instantly recognised for the man who had yesterday spoken in the workshop; "that fell down at the blowing of a ram's horn."

"What do you mean, friend?"

"Why, I mean, that 'unless the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.' I mean, that they on the other side have the better cause, and that a good cause is a good battering-ram.'"

"So, you think they'll take the city?"

"I do, and *sack it for the love of Spain*, with as much gentleness as the Russians did Ismailoff, when the turbaned Turk, with his whiskers curled, neither asked quarter, nor got it."

"Is that the way a good cause prospers?"

"A soldier's a soldier, be the cause what it may; and the Dons of Badajos will find the steel of their friends as sharp as ever they found that of their enemies."

"Why, you croak more than befits an old soldier."

"It's because I am an old soldier that I do croak. I leave your young ones to crow and to coo:—give me but a pair of wings, whether doves' or ravens' it would little matter, I would soon flee after old *Purefoi*, that was killed yesterday, and share his quiet."

"Life, friend, has its duties;—none more duties than a soldier's."

"And life has charms that soldiers never taste. I tell you, sir, it is a stained earth; at least, it is wherever we tread; and I care not how soon the knock comes to my door."

"You speak not in a Christian spirit; you speak like one soured—like one that hates his fellow-creatures."

"Do I?—then my words belie my heart; for I would kneel and weep at the feet of any man, so I might win his soul to its true rest."

"I'll hear you again, friend, on this matter; but this is no time for such speech: there is a 'dull thick noise' about us that silences all such gentle thoughts."

Ernest pondered much on what this strange man said about the coming storm; and he could not but feel a very tender anxiety for the safety of Juliana. Although, for the first few days of the siege, she had been in the habit of coming out to mass as usual, knowing, from the experience of two former sieges, that lasted indeed but a short time, that there was no danger to be apprehended in the two streets through which she had to pass, yet, for the last week, she had never stirred abroad. As Ernest passed her door, returning to his quarter, he felt a strange desire to cross the threshold, and give her some cautions, but he repressed the wish. I shall only, said he, alarm her, and agitate myself. So he went on, dropping a warm blessing at the door, and thinking how sweet it would be to enter it once again; and then, (and he checked a rising sigh,) what ecstacy to enter it as Harry the Englishman would! Well, it bid fair to be a blank world to him; but there was another. He would go snatch a few minutes' thought about that.

Poor Juliana, who had for a few days borne the firing admirably well, and whose anticipations had been almost joyous, was worn down by the continuance and increased vigor of the cannonade. She scarce closed her eyes; she started at every salvo. The image of Harry incessantly exposed to peril haunted her; and the confident tone held by the garrison inclined her now to think, that, after a disastrous and heavy loss, the English would be driven away, and Harry and herself again, and perhaps forever, separated. She was very unhappy, and almost hopeless.

As the time drew near for the assault of the place, the spirits of the brave and sanguine Harry himself were a little depressed. He was sitting with Ralph Harland at the door of their tent about sunset on the evening of the 5th of April, under the full impression that the storm would take place that night. Ralph and Harry were very fond of each other, but each of them had thoughts at the moment, which kept them silent. They were so intimate, and so brave, that they feared not to think and to sigh in each other's presence.

Their social silence was broken by the stopping of the old adjutant, as he was passing by, and telling them that the assault was not to take place that night. "I am vexed at its being put off," said the old soldier; "for the men are quite primed for the job, and there's nothing would stop them."

"Yes, yes," said Ralph Harland; "it's the plunder some of the rascals are thinking about. Ah! it's horrible work."

"Well, well," said the old adjutant, "the brave fellows will have earned it all; a few of old Jack Espangnol's dollars—it's all fair play."

"Ah! yes; but think of such scoundrels as the three Kingdoms—I believe there's not a crime you can name those rascals did not commit at Rodrigo."

"Ah! I know it, but I have fixed those gentlemen finely—they are put on duty, and won't be in the ranks."

"The best job you ever did, Plummet: I only wish their three heads might be knocked off by a thirty-two pounder. It's the only instance I ever saw of an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotchman being sworn friends.* 'Rogues all,' is their motto."

"No," said Plummet, "there's not much to choose between 'em; but I am more vexed at the storm being put off on Mark Greville's account than for any thing else—I am sorry poor Mark volunteered. It's a bad job any way; but it's a terrible bad job to have a forlorn hope hanging on one's mind for two long days and a night between.

"Have you seen him this evening?"

"Yes, I have just left him. 'Well,' said he, with a smile, 'my captain's commission will be dated only a day later, that's all:' but I don't think Mark will ever be a captain in this world, and I suspect he knows that well."

As he spoke, Greville came up with a cigar in his mouth. "There's an English mail," said he; "letters will be here directly."

"Here, Mark," said Harry Blount, "sit down, my boy," making room for him on a long portmanteau, on which he was seated, "and take a glass of cold punch; and bring yourself to an anchor, old Plummet, till the letters come."

They sat chatting about the past events of the siege, and about the taking of the city, till the drum-major arrived in camp. The old adjutant went away to the colonel's, and in a few moments after the party got their letters, or rather letter, for there was but one; and that for Mark Greville. The night was rather windy, so that he had to read it by the light of a lantern, and both Blount and Harland agreed afterwards that they had never witnessed any thing more truly affecting. Mark was a manly, handsome young man, somewhat disappointed by the slowness of his promotion, and of late a little stung by some severities on the part of one of his superior officers; he was poor, too, and a little in debt. These, and many minor circumstances, unknown to any but himself, had induced him to volunteer one of the forlorn hopes. The delay had rather worried and depressed him, though he strove to conceal this effect; but now, that he had before him a letter from home, his emotion and anxiety were but too clear. He smiled with his eyes, and then those eyes became suffused with tears, and then again he smiled, and read on, and became very thoughtful and very pale.

"Pleasant news," said he, as he put the lantern down, and folded up the letter with trembling hands. "Its from my sister. Dear girl, she's going to be married:—I hope she'll be happy;—indeed there's no fear of that, she could not have made a better choice:—it's an old schoolfellow of mine; a young country clergyman:—a blessing on him for his postscript. It is gold, every word of it;" with that he rose, and dashing a tear-drop from his eye, added "Good night, lads, I am going to write a letter home; my mind's made up. Remember, Harry Blount, if ever, you get to old England, to ride over from Exeter, and see my sister, and Marlow her husband. He's one of those men they call a saint, but you'll find him a right good fellow for all that; and my sister Fanny is so cheerful, and sings so sweetly, 'tis a cordial for low spirits to be in her company. Good night."

At the noon-parade on the morrow both Harry and his friend Ralph remarked that Greville looked calm and resigned, thoughtful indeed, but withal bright.

The sixth of April was a particularly fine day: in the afternoon, as Harry lay upon the grass not far from the lines of the men, he overheard two who were nearer to him, and somewhat louder than the others, discourse as follows:—

"Well, Jem," said one, I am glad they have got a big hole in that wall at last."

"They say," replied his comrade, "that the grande lord is going to let the mounseers out."

"By the powers, I'll cut him if he does. No, no, that will never do; it's my own commissary I want to be in old Badad-jos for twenty-four hours; and if I dont get a belly ful of good victuals, and a skinful of good wine, and a pocketful of yellow doubloons, I'm a Dutchman; and may the provost-marshal bring me up with a round turn as I'll bring him down with a round bullet, if I catch him meddling before his time."

"Well, well," rejoined his comrade, "'happy the wooing that's not long a doing." I hope we'll go slap dash at the walls soon after dark."

"Harry felt sick as death; of nothing could he think but the streets of Cindad Rodrigo, as he remembered them the night of that assault, and of Juliana exposed and terrified amid the tumult and license of the hour. He had never before, in going into action, felt such intense anxiety to escape a disabling wound as at that evening. To be early in the town, and early at the house of the Montalvos,—this was his hope, his prayer, his sole object. He went so far as, without saying what for, to tell his favorite serjeant to see and stick close to him, with half a dozen or more of the best men, and the moment they were in the place to follow where he should lead.

CHAPTER VIII.

"What rein can hold licentious wickedness,
When down the hill he holds his fierce career?
We may as bootless spend our vain command
Upon the enraged soldiers in their spoil,
As send precepts to the leviathan
To come ashore."

KING HENRY V.

The billiard-room in the Calle de los Santos was lighted up and crowded with French officers, on the evening of the 6th of April, to witness a match between two of the best players in the garrison of Badajos. By way of a novelty, too, suggested perhaps by the presence of a British force under the walls, they were playing the English game.—"Thirteen to nine," cried the marker. "To arms," "to arms," cried the French orderly-serjeant, putting his head in at the door, nearly at the same moment; "the English are coming on;" and immediately the room was emptied of all the lookers-on, who went out, cursing the English for the *contretempts*, and pledging themselves to make short work of the repulse. The players, who, owing to the heat of the room, and for greater freedom of arm, were without their coats, and delayed a minute longer.

"Confound these blundering English," said one of them: "I was in fine play, and should have won the game to a certainty. Remember the game, marker,—'thirteen to nine;' we'll be back in half an hour and play it out."

"I'll double my bets, if you like," said his antagonist. "If you let a ball stir, marker, I'll be the death of you: remember, I am nine." So saying, they sallied forth to battle, captivity, or perhaps death.

A corporal of the sappers and miners came running into the billet of Ernest Lavalle with the same report with which the serjeant had run to the billiard room. Ernest was reading: he shut the book on the instant, put it by, and, girding on his sword, hur ried out with that upward glancing of the eye, and those moving lips, that mark to Heaven alone, or to the heaven taught observer below, the act of mental prayer. He ran quickly to his post at the breach. The troops were gathering rapidly and quietly on the ramparts, in perfect order; every thing around and without was dark and still. Ernest himself, and every body about him, seemed intent only on listening; scarce a whisper might be heard: they held their breath from an anxious eagerness for the "coming on." From a loud voice or two, a few hundred yards in front, they knew where the English were forming. They threw a large firework from the walls, that lighted up the glacis for a considerable distance, and a few fire-balls, that for several minutes burned brilliantly and beautifully. "There they are," said an old soldier; "there behind the quarry." But less practised eyes saw them not;—the fireballs went out:—presently a French soldier, who stood on the parapet, fixed his musquet. A barrel of combustibles exploded in the ditch—fireballs were thrown in every direction—a light, lurid indeed, but as clear as that at noon-day, shone all about; and Ernest saw the English soldiers hurrying down the ladders into the ditch, and rushing up the breach without a check, and with cheers that rung brave upon the ear, and were answered as loudly by the French.

Ernest stood upon the edge of the parapet, at the corner of the centre breach, charged with the watching of the prepared obstacles; but he uttered no cry of triumph. He had heard of the heroism of British soldiers:—now he witnessed it;—not as a generous man would wish to do—for he knew the obstacles in the breach were insurmountable, and as the gallant Englishmen pressed up, and met their confused and bloody deaths his heart sank within him. The sounds on every side were wild and stunning; but the sight was plain and awful. Red uniforms, and faces furious and frantic, might be distinctly seen from moment to moment, as the white smoke became thin, and was transparent in the fearful illumination. Here were men upon the breach, helpless and hopeless, but that would not turn, and stood, raving curses, till they fell. Here, *close to the studded planks*, a noble officer persisted in vainly trying to force a passage, and was shot deliberately by a French soldier, not five yards above him. There one heroic man, worthy of a better fate, actually gained the *chevaux de-frise*, and making a madly-brave effort to pass it, fell under it, lacerated and destroyed by the stabs and cuttings of a dozen of the murderous sword blades.—There, in the ditch, the numbers of brave men, who saw that further attempting of the breach was vain, but yet who would not retreat, were destroyed by hand-grenades and missile combustibles of every hellish variety;—while grape and musquetry poured upon all those lining the edge of the glacis, and those below to whom the traverses gave no cover. It was throughout a sickening scene of murder;—and murder some of the bravest old French soldiers plainly called it;—but many exulted, leaped upon the parapets, laughed and mocked at and taunted their brave assailants.

Strange that while on every side Ernest heard the loud laughter of triumph and safety, there was a secret persuasion in his heart that the town would be taken. If any thing in the repulse of the enemy from the breach had given him satisfaction, it arose from no national feeling--no feeling about self;—but from the thought that these very men, whose undaunted courage had called forth all his admiration, would, if loose upon the city as conquerers in hot blood, prove demons in fury and crime. But the hopeful thought did not comfort him long, for the German's prophecy again rose to damp it; and soon after even while along the ramparts, near him, from post to post they were crying, "All is well:" sounds of combat from the bastion of San Vincente on the south, and from the castle on the north, gave birth to the fear, which was soon confirmed, that the English had taken the castle and were already fighting in the streets of the city. An effort to retake the castle failed; on the southern side they drove back the British on the ramparts, but it was only a momentary success. Panic and confusion seized the very men who a short hour before were so confident and exulting, precipitately and in disorder they abandoned the town. The Governor with one brigade in better order, crossed the bridge, fighting resolutely in the streets as they retired, and shut himself up in fort St. Christoval. With this brigade, was Ernest Lavalle. Three several times he led a charge against the wild and disorderly groups of British soldiers who were rushing into the city: three times himself and party were forced again to retire; and the officers and men with him made for the bridge, and spoke of all further resistance as useless. The furious assailants blew open the doors right and left, as they came down the streets, and filled the houses, cheering like madmen, and hallooing for plunder. He was close to the door of the Montalvos; the last men of the French detachment were then hurrying down to the bridge. He saw that the English were close at hand, that they spared not a single house in their wild passage—he was in agony—the door of the Montalvos was shut. If he delayed without, he should fall himself upon their threshold, and lose all chance of rendering them service in the scenes to be dreaded within. He caught up a musket, lying at his feet, that had been dropped by some wounded soldier of his own party, put the muzzle of it to the lock of the closed door, and fired. It was strongly fastened and still resisted, but exerting all his strength, he drove it in with the butt of the firelock, and rushed up to the apartment where he thought it probable the family would seek refuge.

Where was Harry Blount? He was binding up the wounds, and listening to the last few words, of his friend Ralph Harland, who lay dying at the foot of the centre breach, surrounded by miserable objects, "shapeless and ghastly," "that once were men," and distracted by the mournful and frantic cries of such as from the agony of their wounds had no power to control the expression of their pain.

"Thank you, thank you, dear Harry. I know you want to be on--never mind me--God bless you."

"No, Ralph, the place is taken; the work, the soldier's work, is already done: I must see you out of this dreadful spot, and safe on the glacis before I go; and God defend those elsewhere whom I would succor." He lifted him in his arms with these words, and, by the help of a slightly-wounded man then passing, got him safe up the ladder out of the ditch, and placed on the glacis. As he laid him down, the hand of Ralph tried to thank him with its pressure, but the weak cold fingers refused their office; his face assumed the never-to be-mistaken aspect; the last kind beams that bespoke consciousness forsook his noble eyes, were succeeded by a filmy dimness, turned glassy; some struggled but inarticulate sound escaped his lips, and Ralph Harland was lost to his country, his corps, and his friend, forever. There, in the presence of the soldier who had assisted him, Harry knelt down, and kissed the dead; and thus in fervent and hurried words he spoke: "Here death hath no sting—here hell hath no victory: in lip and life he was a believer *in Christ*, and shall not die forever. You cannot return to me: may *I go to you* when my hour comes. Bless you, bless you, my good, true, gallant friend!" Again he kissed the corpse, and, leaving it in charge of the soldier, flew down the ladder, and up the breach, and away into the city.

A fearful sight was the city: at every step he met men laden with plunder; the cunning and the covetous sober, and slinking silent away from the stronger and fiercer spoilers, the wanton busy at the work of destruction, breaking, and smashing, and burning whatever came in their way. The streets were covered with chairs, tables, cabinets, pictures, large mirrors, and all sorts of furniture broken or burning. The many were screeching at the top of their voices: every here and there he met desperate-looking ruffians, with fierce drunken eyes, firing their pieces wherever and at whatever they chose. His mind was in a terrible state. He rushed through all these groups and objects with a speed wild and precipitous: he was cheered, or jerred, or pelted, or shot at, just according to the mood of madness in which the various parties that observed him chanced to be; and, at last, reached the house of the Montalvos; at the very door a shot, fired by a drunken marauder from a window opposite, passed through his cap. The fears for Juliana in his bosom were too big, too many, to be told. Terror and dread had well nigh turned his brain. The staircase up which he flew with a trembling swiftness was covered with blood, and the banisters, at which he gladly caught to save himself from falling, were wet with the same.

At last he entered the well-known apartment: at the door of the recess leading to that within, he saw the brave old adjutant bleeding, and leaning against the wall; on the floor immediately before him lay five British soldiers—three dead, two wounded—the room a pool of blood.

"All right, Harry," said the old adjutant, with a faint voice; "all right, my boy. I'm glad you're come: all safe."

He ran forward. In the inner chamber or recess were the women. He saw but one—Juliana. She was on one knee supporting the head of a French officer, who seemed dying: she was pale as death itself, and her white robe bloody. The multitude of thanks and praises, hopes and fears, doubts and jealousies, that filled and distracted his poor mind for one short moment, how can they be told?

She had not as yet perceived him. "Juliana:" she raised her eyes—tried to move—shrieked, and fainted. Ernest Lavalle supported his dying frame upon his hand, as Harry flew to her aid, and said, "Ah! Senhor Henrico, joy to you, joy to you: she loves you well;" and then, as he caught the expression of terrified anxiety, with which, as Harry raised her gently, he remarked the blood upon her dress, he added, with something sweet as a smile in look, and sad as a sigh in tone—"it is my blood, Henrico."

"Ah!" said the old adjutant, whose wound was comparatively slight, "I'll tell you what it is, Harry, that young Frenchman is as fine a fellow as ever drew a sword, and what between sword and pistols he accounted for three of those villains, and I came in time to settle the others. I saw how matters stood, and what the ruffians would be at; so I made no bones of joining the Frenchman, heart and hand: two or three of the rascals got frightened at the sight of their own blood, and set off to plunder elsewhere."

Juliana slowly recovered, and was soon able to welcome Harry to her heart with folded arms, and voice that sobbed for joy; but suddenly she checked her transport, and, resuming her place near Ernest Lavalle, raised his head, as before, to support him in his dying pains.

Can it be, that on the confines of another world, where *all is spirit—all mystery—all holiness*—can it be, that, in the hour of death, the sinner, crying for mercy at the gate of Heaven, should pause in the solemn work, should turn with longing, lingering gaze below, and envy a surviving mortal, weak, frail, and fallen as himself, his earthly gift—the plant of his terrestrial paradise? "Look up, the palm branch is *incorruptible;* look up, the crown is *incorruptible;* look up, they that are accounted worthy to obtain that kingdom neither marry nor are given in marriage."

There was no audible voice to utter this in the ear of the dying Lavalle, but there was a voice, even that of his enlightened conscience, that plainly spoke it.

"I am happy," said Ernest, "quite happy, Oh! this is kind of you, lady; how kind!" Harry also stood over him, but he averted his eyes from Harry, and riveted them on Juliana. "Oh! this is good of God: it is time to die. If this is death, it's pleasant." Brokenly and softly he uttered these short sentences: "I hear bells faint and far off. How strange! I see a man in white. What a man! Yes, I will leave her; I will leave her. I am ready, quite ready. I am thine, Lord: thou knowest that I love thee."

The head Juliana supported became weighty with death; and the gentle spirit of the dying lover was wafted on the airs of heaven to those happy realms, where *"the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at* REST."

The drama of my tale is closed. Methinks that I might leave it to my gentle reader to imagine, how that as corn, and grass, and flowers will grow up strong, and green, and fragrant, from the very fields that have been wet with blood; so, after a while, Harry and Juliana married, and were blessed and happy in each other; but custom compels the teller of a story to dismiss the actors on his little stage in a due full form, with a word upon the fate and after life of each. Herein the readers of a fiction ask that of the narrator, which real life does very generally deny to them.

In life, the destinies of men are hurried forward with a precipitancy that mocks the observer; or their thread is suddenly broken off; or their course is sluggish and retarded, and they fall behind the world of observation. On the ocean of real life, ships of souls sail for a few weeks, or months, or years together, or, it may be, only for one day, one hour, in company—and part. In storm or calm,—a wind, a current may separate them against their wills; or they vary their course: one boldly beats to windward; one heavily drives to leeward. They meet no more; they hear of each other no more. Still on the same sea: the shore of eternity not yet made: perhaps not four hours' sail asunder:—but they gaze around their limited horizon, and see each other no more.

However, as I do chance to know a few particulars in the present instance, which may interest my reader, he shall have them.

On a fine glowing day, early in the autumn of the same year on which Badajos fell, old Parson Blount was sitting alone in his little study, that looked out upon the very shadiest nook in his garden; a corner it was of a larger lawn—a bit that was more deeply green, more softly velvet, than any other. Windows stood open. The air was impregnated with the odour of shrubs and flowers. Birds were still: Every thing around breathed repose. It was a Saturday. His wife and daughters and younger boys were out, and he had been left at home alone, to prepare a sermon for the morrow. He had chosen his text from the 130th Psalm: "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared."

He needed not the help of books, for he was learned and gifted, and what is the great secret of all ministerial success, a man of prayer.

But he had not always been so. He had taken orders, when he left the university, with little thought about the deep responsibility of the office; he had married early; lived carelessly for the first few years of his residence in the country; and had bred up a large family, of whom he was most indulgently fond.

As he was meditating upon the tender, filial, reverential fear enjoined in the passage he had chosen, and upon the mysterious root of that fear,—*the sense of transgression, and*

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*Three men in a regiment, notorious marauders, being from England, Ireland and Scotland, received the nickname of "Three Kingdoms."