msa_sc3326_scm8207-0248 ©Maryland State Archives

BOOTLES' BABY.

CHAPTER VIII.

A crowd of roughs, a lesser crowd of third-rate spectators, and a lesser gathering of fashionable ones were assembled on the Blankhampton race course, for it was the Scarlet Lancer steeplechases.

On the grand stand were to be seen most of the ra k and fashion of the neighborhood, and a goodly show of that class of people who are always to be found about towns which are also military stations—the class of people who have daughters to marry, and not much money to marry them with.

There were all the Scarlet Lancer ladies in full force, from the colonel's wife in blue velvet and sables to the quartermaster's lady in a hard felt hat, with long diamond and pearl earrings. There were officers in cords and boots, their silken finery hidden by Newmarket coats. And there was the bride, Mrs. Allardyce, in pink and gray, the major's racing colors—oh lor! as the fellows said when they saw her. And there was Miss Mignon, a little three-year-old belle, got up in Bootles' colors—scarlet, purple and gold—adapted in her small case to a warm frock of purple velvet, braided with scarlet and gold, and on her golden curls a jockey cap to match it. Utterly absurd, most people said, but Bootles didn't seem to see it. Nor, for the matter of that, did Miss Mignon herself. Held by Bootles, or, when Bootles was riding, by Lacy, she sat on the broad ledge of the balcony and surveyed the world, like a queen in miniature.

It was a fine place for seeing; yes, and a fine place for hearing, too, as Lacy testified afterward in his own peculiar style of delivery:

"Er—I and Miss Mignon were waiting for Bootles to come down the lawn, when—er—a lady next to us—er—a little unpreposessing person—I found out afterward that her name is Berwry—with a nose like a teapotspout, and a mouth of the bulldog ordah—little daughter, by the bye, pretty much of the same type, but just a shade less hideous—suddenly electwrified us by pulling out a huge pair of gold eye-glasses, and holding the wrace-card at arm's-length.

"Ow!" said she in a mincing voice, when Miles came down the lane looking like a sack of flour in a purple satin jacket—'Ow, *Cap*-tain Ferwrahs! Ow, Dorothy, my deah, *Cap*-tain Ferwrahs! *Vewry* handsome—and how *beau*-tifully he wrides! Ow, I'm shaw he'll win, and what a *lovely* horse! *Cap*-tain Ferwrahs! He's vewry handsome.'

"Well—er—I gave Miss Mignon a gwreat squeeze to hold her tongue—and she did. This Mrs.—er—Berwry went on expatiating on Miles' great beauty of person, and on the absolute certainty of his winning. 'And his pet name is Bootles,' she informed us. His *pet* name! Well, pwresently Bootles came sailing down the lawn in all his glowry, and Miss Mignon quite forgot the old girl, and shouted out to him. 'Bootles,' she called—'Bootl s.'

"Bootles glanced up, and waved his hand, and—er—the old party called Berwry turned wround and eyed her sharply, saw the scarlet, purple and gold of her dwress, looked at her card and said, witheringly, 'Ow, I don't know *him*,' as if there were a dozen Capt. Ferwers knocking about, and this was one of the eleven she didn't know.

"Well, when the wrace was over—er—who should come up but Miles.

"'Ah, Miles,' said I, 'I—er—heard a laday expatiating just now on your extrwremes beauty and gwrace and elegance of person—was shaw you'd win. What a pity you didn't!'

"'Bless my soul!' said Miles, 'was she pretty?'

"'Oh, don't be flattered; she took you for Bootles,' said I, ignoring the question.

"'Bootles' money again!' cwried Miles, with a gwreat wroar of laughter.

"Well, in two twos up comes Bootles. 'See me win, Mignon!' said he.

"So i—er—told him the stowry, too, and Bootles laughed that absurd 'Ha! haf' of his. 'Come along and have some lunch, Mignon, my sweetheart,' said he, *'and let's be out of this.'*"

But it was after this incident that the most important event of that bright May day occurred—one of those fearful struggles to win when half a dozen horses show well for the post, and all the field finds tongue and shouts its hardest.

"Ferrers wins! Blue and fawn—yellow and black! Miles wins—Miles wins! No, no; Ferrers in front—fawn and blue! Hartog—Hartog—Hartog wins! Miles in front! Ah, he's down! Ferrers—Miles—Blue and fawn—Gilchrist gains—Miles—Gilchrist—Ferrers wins! Ferrers wins! All up with the others! Ferrers WINS!"

And then the company—good, bad and indifferent—had time to remember that a man was down—no, not one man, but two. To find out that Hartog was bruised and stunned, but able with help to get to the dressing room and recover himself, to learn that the swarming crowd around the other was watching a more exciting race than that which they had just witnessed with shouts and applause, that they were watching with awe and in silence a race between Life and Death—for Gilchrist, the "old" man of the regiment, the man who had been nobody's friend, nobody's chum, was lying in the midst of them with his back broken, waiting for a hurdle.

A race between Life and Death.

They were all as sorry as men could be who had never been moved by feelings of friendship. The proceedings were stopped at once, and they went gravely back to barracks, those who had ridden to get into morning clothes, and all of them to hang about waiting for news.

But there was no hope, absolutely no hope whatever. With all his faults, failings and peculiarities, Gavor Gilchrist was passing away from their midst by exchange, as Hartog had once wished—the exchange, not of one regiment for another, but of this world for the next.

It was about 6 o'clock that the senior of the two surgeons in attendance on Gilchrist entered the anteroom, and, looking around, beckoned for Bootles.

"What news?" asked several voices.

"He won't last the night, Bootles, he wants you."

"I'll come," said Bootles, rising.

"Sure to want Bootles," observed Preston.

"Oh, yes; I should myself," returned another.

"Won't last the night," remarked a third. "Well, I never did like Gilchrist—never; but, all the same, I'm deuced sorry for him now, poor chap. For oh, by Jove! it's a fearful thing when you come to that."

And then they fell into silence again, waiting for Bootles to come back. Half an hour passed—three-quarters; then Bootles did not come. An hour; then Bootles appeared—came with a white face and a scared look in his blue eyes, followed by the doctor who had fetched him. Every man in the room was roused from a lounging attitude to one of expectation and surprise.

"Bootles," said Lacy, moving towards him.

But Bootles did not even look at him. He turned to the doctor and uttered words the like of which none of his hearers had ever heard from him before.

"I kept my temper, doctor—you think I did? I know the man's dying. Yes, I know, and I shouldn't like to think I lost my temper with a poor chap who was dying, but—but— No; I won't say a word. I'll go away and keep off myself until I've got over it a little. If I stop here I shall say something I shall be sorry for all the rest of my life."

"What is it, Bootles?" broke in Lacy, in his soft voice.

But Bootles did not reply for a moment. He stood still, trying hard to control himself; but Lacy, who had laid his hand upon his sleeve, felt that he was shaking from head to foot, and his very lips were trembling.

"Tell us," said Lacy persuasively. "What is it?"

"He is Mignon's father!" Bootles answered. And then he broke from Lacy's grasp and fled.

"Impossible!" Lacy cried.

"Not at all; it is true," the doctor answered. "He is making his will now, leaving Bootles sole guardian and trustee to the child."

"The brute!" burst out Preston, indignantly, remembering Gilchrist's words, not death alters everything," the doctor cried.

"And Bootles kept his temper? Said nothing?"

"Not one word—of reproach."

"Has he seen her?"

"No. He would not, though Bootles asked him."

"His own child—and she Miss Mignon!"

"All the better. She cannot endure him."

"By Jove! But what a blow for Bootles!"

"How will he take it? Will it make any difference?"

"As wregards Miss Mignon? What wrot you talk. As if Bootles—" But there Lacy broke off in disgust, and the babel of surmises, questions and answers went on.

And that night Gavor Gilchrist died.

CHAPTER IX.

Oh, but it was a blow for Bootles! To find he had been duped, tricked, made a fool of all this time; to remember the anxiety, the trouble, the expense to which he had been put; nay, to recall the chaff he had endured, and then to discover that Miss Mignon was Gilchrist's child—the child of the man he went perhaps nearer to hating than any one he had ever known in all his life! Everything came back to him then—the dead man's jibes and sneers and taunts, his unwearied efforts to tax him with an offense which he knew he had not committed. And though he had failed in that, oh, what a fool Gilchrist had made of him! That was the sting Bootles felt most of anything.

For hours after he left the anteroom Bootles kept out of every one's way—indeed until Lacy came to tell him that Gilchrist was dead. Then, it being close upon the hour of eleven, he went and knocked at the door of Mignon's nursery. The nurse opened it a few inches, and, seeing who it was, set it open wide.

"Is Miss Mignon asleep?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; hours ago," the woman answered.

He passed into the inner room where the child was lying. A candle burned on a table beside the cot, casting its light on the fair baby face, now flushed in sleep, and on the tangled golden curls. Both her arms lay outside the elder coverlet, one hand grasping the whip with which he had ridden *and won* that day, the other holding the card of the races. Bootles bent and scanned her face closely, but not one trace could he discern of likeness to the father—not one—and he drew a deep breath of relief that it was so.

Well he remembered Lacy's puzzled scrutiny of the year-old baby. "There's a likeness, but I don't know where to plant it." If there had been a likeness to Gilchrist then, it had now passed away; and as Bootles satisfied himself that it was so, his love for her, which during the last few hours had hung trembling in the balance, though he would hardly have acknowledged it, even to himself, reasserted itself, and rose up in his heart stronger than ever. Just then she moved uneasily in her sleep.

"Lal, where *is* Bootles?" she asked. Then, after a pause, "Gotted *another* headache?" And an instant later, "Miss Grace said Mignon was to be *very* kind to Bootles."

Bootles bent down and kissed her and she awoke.

"Bootles," she said, in sleepy surprise; then, imperatively, "Take me up."

So Bootles carried her to the fire in the adjoining room, where the nurse was sewing a fresh frill of lace on the pretty velvet frock, with its braidings of scarlet and gold, which she had worn that day.

"Lal said Mignon wasn't to go to Bootles," she said reproachfully.

"Bootles has been bothered, Mignon," he answered.

"Poor Bootles!" stroking his cheek with her soft hand. "Bootles was vexed; Lal said so. But not with Mignon. Mignon told Lal so," confidently.

"Never with Mignon," answered Bootles, resting his cheek against the tossed golden curls, and feeling as if he had done this faithful baby heart a moral injustice by his hours of anger and doubt.

There was a moment of silence, broken by the nurse. "Have you heard, sir, how Mr. Gilchrist is?" she asked.

Bootles roused himself. "He is dead, nurse. Died half an hour ago."

"Then, if you please, sir," she asked, hesitatingly, "might I ask if it is true about Miss Mignon?"

"Yes, it is true," his face darkening.

"Because, sir, Miss Mignon should have mourning," she began, when Bootles cut her short.

"I shall not allow her to wear mourning for Mr. Gilchrist," he said, curtly; so the nurse dared say no more.

Three days later the funeral took place; and if the facts of the dead man's having acknowledged Miss Mignon as his child, and having admitted to Bootles that he had transferred her that night from his own quarters to Bootles' rooms, created a sensation, it was as nothing to the intense surprise caused by the will, which was read, by the dead man's desire, before all the officers of the regiment.

In it he left his entire property to his daughter, Mary Gilchrist, now in the care of Capt. Ferrers, and commonly known as Mignon, on condition that Capt. Ferrers consented to be her sole guardian and trustee until she had attained the age of 21, or until her marriage, provided it should be with her guardian's sanction, and on the express understanding that Capt. Ferrers should not give up the care of the child to her mother, even temporarily. To his wife, Helen Gilchrist, a copy of this testament was to be sent forthwith. Should any of the conditions be violated, the whole property of which he died possessed should go to his cousin, Lucian Gavor Gilchrist; but if the conditions be faithfully observed Capt. Ferrers should have the power of applying any, or all, of the income arising from the estate for the use and maintenance of the said Mary Gilchrist.

"Cwrazy!" murmured Lacy to Bootles, who listened in contemptuous silence, and wondered in no small dismay what kind of a life he should have if Mignon's mother chose to make herself objectionable.

But the will was not crazy at all; far from it. It was only a very cleverly thought out plan for keeping mother and child apart. Bootles would take care not to endanger Mignon's inheritance, and Gilchrist had taken advantage of it to carry out his animosity towards his wife to the bitter end.

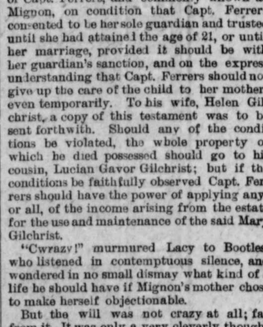
But, of course, there was one contingency he had never thought of or provided for—*marriage*.

It was less than a week after Gilchrist's death that Bootles received a note by hand, signed Helen Gilchrist.

"Already!" he groaned, impatiently.

"May I trouble you to send the child to see me for half an hour during this afternoon," she said, and that was all.

But Bootles did not see *sending* the child to be quietly stolen away. He forgot quite that since Gilchrist had not left his widow a farthing she would probably be now no better able to provide for the child than she had been when compelled to cast her baby upon the father's mercy. Therefore, immediately after lunch, he drove down to the hotel from which the note had been written. Yes; Mrs. Gilchrist was within—this way. And then—then—Bootles, with the child fast holding his hand, was shown into a room, and there they found—*Miss Grace!*



Bootles watched them—the two he loved best on earth.

The truth flashed into his mind instantly. She rose hurriedly, and he saw that she was clad in black, but was not in widow's dress. She fell upon her knees and almost smothered Mignon with kisses.

"Mignon! Mignon!" she cried.

"Mignon has been very kind to Bootles," Mignon explained, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"My Mignon! my baby!" the mother sobbed.

Bootles watched them—the two things he loved best on earth.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he asked at last.

"What shall I say?" She had risen from her knees, and now moved shyly away

"You might say," said Bootles, severely, "that you are very sorry that you, a married woman, deceived me and stole my heart away. You might say that, for one thing."

"But I am not sorry," cried Mignon's mother, mutinously.

"Then you might take a leaf out of Mignon's book, and say, as she says when I have a headache, 'Mignon loves Bootles.'"

"I wrally do think," remarked Lacy to the fellows, when the astounding news had been told and freely discussed, "that now we must let that poor, malicious, cwrooked-minded chap west in his gwrave in peace. Seems to me," he continued, with his most reflective air, "that—er—Solomon was wright, and said a vewry wise thing, when he said, 'Love laughs at locksmiths.'"

"Solomon!" cried a voice, amid a shout of laughter.

"Oh, wasn't it Solomon?" questioned Lacy, mildly. "Is's of no consequence; some one said it. But only think of that poor devil spending his last moments wraising a barwrier to keep mother and child apart, and old Bootles fulfills all the conditions to the letter—and bwreaks them all in the spirit by—marwriage!"

THE END.

"HOUP-LA."

CHAPTER I.

"Now come, young shaver, look alive! At it again? Come, be quick, don't waste my time like this, or," with a threatening and significant quiver and crack of a long white whip, "it'll be worse for you. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Frisco," he replied, in a shaking voice, and he traced himself up for another effort. He then added in lower tones of utter desperation, I *know* I'll *never* be able to do it."

"Be quick about it, then," the man called Frisco growled in brutal savageness. "I've spent more time over teaching you this, you young limb of evil, than all your cursed little body is worth. I believe you do it on purpose."

"No, I don't. I don't, Mr. Frisco," in an agony of appeal, and with a glance of terror at the white thong in the ringmaster's strong and merciless hand.

"Ah, well, you'd better do it *this* time," was the reply.

There was a moment of intense silence in the deserted circus ring, lighted only by one flaring gas jet and such daylight as could flicker feebly through the ventilation apertures at the top of the tent.

The boy, an ill-fed, meager-faced, undersized lad of 12 years old or so, with thin trembling lips, tightened by a life of misery and fear, and with big, bright, blue eyes, unnaturally keen and quick, stood ready to mount the ladder leading to the several trapeze swings high above their heads. Poor little chap, poor waif and stray, bound body and soul to the owners of a traveling circus! He had now been many days trying hard to achieve a difficult and dangerous trapeze leap, which was, in fact, utterly beyond the strength of his poor half-starved little body to perform. He knew he should never do it, he had tried hard, nay, his very best. That leap was never absent from his thoughts for a single instant during his waking hours, very seldom from his dreams! Night after night he dreamt with horror of his morning's rush through the air, and of the failure of his little nervous fingers to catch the bar of the opposite swing, and many a time he sat up on his poor hard bed and hugged himself to make quite sure his body was still whole and his bones unbroken.

"Come, up you go! How much more of my time are you going to waste?" shouted the ringmaster, savagely.

So up he went, stood for a moment on the tiny platform high up aloft, a quivering, shuddering figure in a set of worn and ragged tights, looked desperately round, as if appealing for help to the rows and rows of empty ghost-like benches, clenched his hands hard for a moment, the nervous hands whose palms were hot and wet with the sweat of fear, wiped them hastily on his tight-clad thighs, took the leap, and, missing the bar, *fell!*

A fierce oath burst from the ringmaster's lips as the lad fell with a dull thud into the net below. There was a quiver and a crack of the long white whip, followed by a piercing shriek as the boy rolled out of the netting on to the ground and rushed for protection to the hated ladder, which was no protection at all from the cruel lash wielded by Frisco's strong and merciless arm.

"Up you go, no nonsense," he shouted. "Fail this time, curse you, and you shall do he trick without the netting."

"I'll be killed," sobbed the boy.

"It's all you're worth! Up you go, I say, and be quick about it," and a crack of the whip gave point and accent to the words, only too well understood by his wretched little victim.

So up he toiled once more, dashing the tears from his eyes as he climbed the cruel, and to him now, dizzy height, then he reached the platform again, and looked his fate hard in the face, as hard as the blinding tears, which came thick and fast over the big blue eyes, would let him.

If he failed this time, oh, what could save him then! He knew that the absence of the netting below would take all his nerve away, and that the leap to follow would be his last. If only he could manage to clutch that bar this time! If only his legs would not shake under him, and his hands tremble so! If only the tears which filled his eyes——

"Be quick!" shouted the hoarse voice below him, and so, in haste, he took the leap, and *fell again!*

The white thong flew out again with a hiss, and curled once more round the tortured and quivering little body. Again the boy's piercing shrieks echoed through the gloomy circus tent.

"You shall do it without the net," the ringmaster shouted, flinging down his whip and flying to unfasten the cords which held it in place.

As the boy rolled down at his feet he kicked him aside, but the next instant he had measured his length upon the ground, and lay biting the filthy and trampled sawdust of the ring.

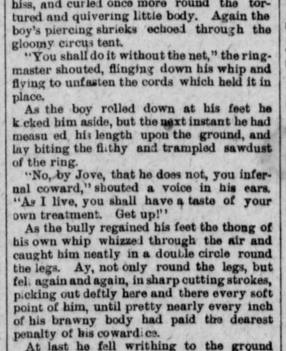
"No, by Jove, that he does not, you infernal coward," shouted a voice in his ears. "As I live, you shall have a taste of your own treatment. Get up!"

As the bully regained his feet the thong of his own whip whizzed through the air and caught him neatly in a double circle round the legs. Ay, not only round the legs, but fell again and again, in sharp cutting strokes, picking out deftly here and there every soft point of him, until pretty nearly every inch of his brawny body had paid the dearest penalty of his cowardice.

At last he fell writhing to the ground again, shrieking, groaning, swearing, cursing and vowing vengeance on the wretched little acrobat's avenger.

The newcomer stayed his arm and drew the long white thong through his gloved left hand, as if it had done good service, and he was grateful to it.

A long, lithe, handsome fellow he was, soldier all over him, well set up and smart, neatly and plainly dressed, with no sign of ornament about him but a little pin of lapis lazuli in his white cotton cravat and a couple of diamond rings on the strong, bare right hand, which held the stock of the whip. He was as cool as ice, too, and surveyed the writhing, spluttering bully on the ground with infinite amusement in his steady blue eyes, as blue as those of the astonished little acrobat beside the ladder, who kept dashing his tears away and caught his still sobbing breath as he gazed with awe and reverence on "the swell wot had walloped Mr. Frisco"—the great and mighty Mr. Frisco, who, to his poor, benighted little mind was the very embodiment of strength and power.



"As I live, you shall have a taste of your own treatment."

He knew that "the swell" in question was Capt. Ferrers, of the Scarlet Lancers, then lying in Idleminster barracks. He knew him quite well, for the officers had often patronized the circus during the few weeks the tent had been pitched in the city, and once Capt. Ferrers had tipped him half a crown for an especially difficult feat he had performed on a bespeak night for the officers of the regiment.

It was true that Mr. Frisco had promptly taken the half crown from him, but, all the same, that fact notwithstanding, the memory of the giver had dwelt lovingly ever since in his heart.

And behold! There was his benefactor quietly and caressingly drawing Mr. Frisco's white thong through his fingers and smiling down upon that gentleman's writhing form in a way which would have made the lad laugh out loud if he had dared to do it.

He wondered what "the swell from the barracks" would do next. And presently he saw and heard.

"Here, stop that row," he said, authoritatively.

The lad rubbed his bruises and fairly chuckled; the ringmaster continued his writhing and groaning, throwing in an oath here and there by way of a little variation.

"Do you hear?" said Ferrers, raising his voice, "or do you *want* another taste of this? Get up!"

Very slowly and unwillingly the ringmaster rose from the sawdust-laid ground, driven to it by the significant spread of the soldier's strong right arm.

"Are you this boy's father?" Ferrers demanded, curtly.

"No."

"Where is his father?"

"He's dead."

"And his mother?"

"She's dead too!"

"Ah!—and who looks after him?"

"I do" (very unwillingly).

"Oh! you do! Ah! Nice way you've got of doing it! Well, if you want him back again you can apply to the magistrates, and, meantime, I shall give the police orders to look after you at once. Come along, my lad."

"He's my apprentice—he's bound to me," the ringmaster put in sullenly, as the boy crept round to his new friend and protector's side. At the same time he edged away from the reach of Ferrers' arm. "He has cost me pounds and pounds, and——"

"Yes. You can tell all that to the magistrates, you know," said the soldier, blandly "By the way, have you any papers to show? Because, if you have, the magistrates will be glad to see them also. However, here is my card—though you know me well enough without it."

He made a gesture to the boy to go before him, and went out of the tent, still carrying the whip in his hand. Frisco shook his fist at his recreating figure, and growled out an oath or two, not loud—he was too fearful of rousing the lion again for that—but very deep.

There were generally a few loungers and ne'er-do-weels hanging about the circus tent, but not one of them had thought of going within to inquire into the cause of the shrieks and screams which all of them had heard quite as plainly as Capt. Ferrers had done. They were accustomed to them—at least, such as belonged to the company were; it was only one of the youngsters getting an extra licking, and if Frisco was a bit hard on them, why, doubtless, Frisco had plenty of provocation. Anyway, it was no business of any one else's, and Frisco was a dangerous customer to interfere with.

Now, when the lad, followed by Ferrers, emerged from the tent, there were a dozen or so of them lounging against the railing, which served for entrance and advertisement boards alike. They saw that the lad had been in for it again—he always did seem to be in for it, poor little toad—they fancied it must be, half of it, through sheer obstinacy, for he was an uncommonly clever lad at certain things, of which the snake performance was one.

One or two of the circus troupe looked up in rough pity, which was, however, quickly checked by the sight of the big soldier—well known to all of them—who came just behind him, carrying Frisco's better known whip in his hand. Hollo! they wondered what was up now, and their wonder was certainly not decreased when Capt. Ferrers hailed a passing cab, bade the boy get in, entered it himself, and was driven away in the direction of the barracks.

"That was Capting Ferrers," said one, "and he had Frisco's whip in his 'and."

"Been a-leathering o' Frisco, I should think," suggested another, but without the wildest idea that his words, uttered in jest, were as gospel truth.

"'Ere he is to speak for 'isself. I'll ask 'im," laughed a third, who chanced to be too big to stand in any awe of the ringmaster.

"'Ello, Frisco," he remarked lightly, "'as the swell from the barracks been a-leathering of yer?"

Frisco muttered something quite unintelligible, and passed on, leaving the little group staring after him in profoundest surprise.

"You've 'it the right nail on the 'ead this time, old boy," exclaimed one at last, addressing the big young man who was not afraid of Frisco.

"Well, I'm blowed," said the big young man, blankly.

CHAPTER II.

The little acrobat, in his worn and shabby tights, when Capt. Ferrers told him to get into the cab, seated himself meekly and with fear and trembling, though with now and then a glance of passionate admiration and reverence at his deliverer on the opposite seat to him. He hardly knew what to think of him—certainly as something scarcely human, for humanity of Ferrers' type had never before dawned upon the, till now, changeless horizon of his sad life. He had never heard of God or of heaven, except in such ways as did not give him any idea of their blessed goodness and peace; he had never heard of the angels at all, or perhaps he might have likened Ferrers to one of them; but as it was, he simply, in his unformed and ignorant mind, thought of how he should like to be in a circus of which "the swell was boss."

The soldier guessed something of what was passing through his mind.

"Are you cold?" he asked in his kindly voice, the voice which had brought comfort to many and many an aching and weary heart.

The boy nodded. "Aye, sir," and shivered.

"Well, never mind, my lad, you shall be warm by and by. Oh, what's your name?"

"They call me Houp-La," the boy replied.

"Houp-La, ah! A very likely name for you. But what is your real name?"

"Tom Snow," hesitatingly, "Leastways, that was wot old Mrs. Wilson used to tell me my name was."

"And who is Mrs. Wilson?"

"She's dead. She wos the lady wot kept the wardrobes."

Involuntarily the soldier's lips relaxed into a smile, and the boy struck in eagerly:

"She wos werry good to me, wos old Mrs. Wilson. She wos a werry kind lady. Sometimes she used to give me my tea."

"And how long has she been dead?"

"Oh, a long time. I wos a little chap then."

Ferrers smiled again. "You're not a very big one now, my boy. How old are you?"

"Twelve. Going on thirteen, sir."

"Ah!" Then, after a pause, "Can you read?"

The brown head was vigorously shaken, and the blue eyes stared widely at the question.

"Or write?"

The head was shaken again. "No; but I can do the snake trick and the wriggling dodge—they're both werry difficult," eagerly.

Ferrers laughed. "Yes, I know. I've seen you do them both. Now here we are," as the cab stopped at the door of the officers' quarters. "Come with me."

There were several officers, some in uniform and some in plain clothes, standing about the doorway, who stared in surprise as Ferrers, followed by the little acrobat, alighted from the cab.

"Why, Bootles," cried one of them, "what are you up to now?"

"At it again?" asked another.

"Yes, at it again. I'll tell you all about it by and by," said Bootles, good-naturedly, and disappeared with his strange companion.

"Why, it is young Houp-La from the circus," exclaimed Lacy. "I'm going after him—er—to see what it means."

He found the favorite of the regiment, which Bootles was to every man, from commanding officer down to the last-joined subaltern and most lately-enlisted recruit, sitting in a big chair before the fire watching the boy, who was crouched all of a heap on the bearskin rug, luxuriating in the heat and warm light of the bright flames which blazed half-way up the chimney.

Bootles looked up. "Ah, is that you, Lacy? Come in."

Lacy closed the door, and pushed the easiest chair he could find up to the fireside.

"Bootles," he said solemnly, "pwray, are you going to establish a Foundling—er—Hospital? Be-cause, if you are—you had—better take my advice and make it headquarters at Ferwrers Court wrather than in Idleminster Bawracks."

Bootles laughed outright.

"You mean young Houp-La, there. Oh, he's all right; he's going under Terry's care. Don't trouble about him; he'll be in nobody's way, and Terry has been asking for extra help ever so long."

"Where did you pick him up?" asked Lacy.

"Down at the circus. That brute Frisco was teaching him a new trapeze trick, with the aid of that," pointing to the long white whip set up against the dressing-table; "and I stopped him and brought young Houp-La away. That's all."

"Of course," Lacy murmured. "It goes without saying. And—er—how did the elegant Mr. Ferrwers come off?"

"He walloped 'im," put in young Houp-La, jerking his thumb towards Bootles, a world of delight shining in his bright and intelligent eyes.

"Ah! walloped him, did he?" repeated Lacy with interest; "and what did Mr. Fwrisco say to that?"

"Howled," answered the boy tersely, holding both his hands to the warmth of the fire. He had learned one lesson, this little circus rider, and that was to make a few words go a very long way. Both his hearers laughed, and then Lacy asked Bootles how it was that he had chanced to be in the circus at that time of day?

"Oh, I was going down to the club, and I happened to hear young Houp-La screaming as I passed. That was all about it," carelessly. "After all it is a very simple matter. He will be under Terry's charge—go to school, and make himself useful."

"I'm to be among the 'orses," explained the boy, suddenly finding his tongue, and turning his blazing eyes upon Lacy; "and I'm to have top boots and a tall 'at, like Mr. Frisco, and go out with the kerridge. And, my word, it were good to see 'im this afternoon. 'E come in, and 'e see wot 'e were up to, and when 'e 'it out at me, the canting, 'e 'its out at 'im, and 'e sends 'im flying down in the sawdust—and then," excitedly, "'e says, says 'e, 'Get up!' and 'e 'ad to get up, and then the capting 'e give him proper. I never see such a wolloping! Mr. Frisco, 'e won't do no double somerset to-night, 'e won't. And then," getting on to his feet, and standing a small skinny figure, looking smaller than he really was by reason of the shabby old tights, worn and torn, with here and there a spangle still clinging to them; "and then, Mr. Frisco, 'e drops down at last, and 'e lies a-cussing and a-swearing like hurroar, and the capting 'e says, 'D'ye *want* some more o' this? Stop that 'ere row,' 'e says. 'D'ye 'ear?' I never see nothink so good afore," fairly chuckling. "With 'is own whip too—that was the best of it."

"It does cut," continued young Houp-La, nodding at the white thong. "I know it well." Then his poor, pinched little face brightened up into positive radiance. "But the capting ain't never going to let me go back to 'im—never no more."

"Here is Terry. Now you shall go along with him and have some dinner and a tub and some warm clothes. And mind, you're not to go outside the barrack gates. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," then added earnestly, and looking his new master straight in the face: "Not if I wos to swing for it."

Bootles laughed, but stayed the lad a moment before Terry took him away.

"Look here, my boy. Do you know what a lie is?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, I want you to remember this: That whatever happens to you, whatever trouble you may get into, you must never tell a lie by way of trying to save yourself. Lies always are found out sooner or later, and they never do any good at all to any one—never."

There was a moment's silence. Then the poor, miserable little waif fell down at Bootles' feet, and flung his arms round his knees.

"I'll never do nothink wot'll vex you."

"There, there, there!" said Bootles, patting the boy's brown head, that he might check this sudden outburst of passionate gratitude. "Now go along with Terry, and mind you do what he bids you. There, go along."

It occurred to both the officers at the same moment that he was by no means an ill-looking boy. True, he was undersized and meager, and his face was pinched and white, the lips very tight and drawn. But, though his face was tear stained and the blue eyes red with weeping, he was not dirty. In fact, his nightly performances prevented any possibility of that, and he had always been considered one of the best-looking boys in the troupe.

"Poor little chap!" said Bootles, as the door closed behind the groom and the boy. "I'm glad I happened to be passing just then."

"Vewry lucky for him," murmured Lacy. "His fortune's made."

Bootles laughed. "Oh, nonsense! I've no doubt he will turn out a very smart groom; and, as I said just now, Terry has been needing help badly for a long time."

He then told Lacy all the details of the scene he had witnessed—how Frisco had sent the lad up the ladder twice, when it was evidently impossible he could perform the feat—how he had threatened to make him try it without the netting spread for protection below, and had even gone so far as to begin to undo the ropes which held it in place. Finally, now he had knocked him down, and then made him get up and take a regular sound hiding, just by way of letting him know what the cut of that particular whip was like.

"But I let the brute off too easily," Bootles wound up, regretfully. "I almost wish I had given him a little more."

"I don't suppose he does," laughed Lacy, rising. "Well, I must be off."

It was surprising how soon young Houp-La, or Tom Snow, as he soon came to be called, settled down into his new life. He took to it as a young duck takes to water. Within a week he was wearing the darling ambition of his heart—that is, top boots and a tall hat with a cockade—and had achieved as smart a salute and "yessir" as any groom in the regiment. Bootles declared he was the sharpest-witted boy he had ever known, at which, of course, neither Bootles nor any one else wondered when his training was taken into consideration.

He was popular, too, with everybody, high and low. He worked hard at his lessons—he would do anything to please Terry—and he adored Bootles. All his master's belongings were sacred in his eyes, and his orders once given were as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. In Tom's eyes there was no officer in the regiment—the regiment! nay, in the whole of the service—whom he would admit to be as strong or as clever, as handsome or as rich, as his master; not one who could ride, or drive, or shoot, or do any mortal thing with the same degree of excellence to which the cap'n attained. Yes, he had very early dropped the "capting," and now clipped the word as short as any soldier in the barracks. In fact, in Tom's eyes, Bootles, like the king, could do no wrong.

The winter months wore away, and by and by the Scarlet Lancers were moved from Idleminster to Aldershot, when Tom numbered among his experiences a different kind of march to those which he had shared with the traveling wagons of the circus, for his master chose him to accompany Terry with his second charger, partly because he was an unusually light weight, and partly because he wanted to keep him under his own eye.

By that time Tom was thoroughly *au fait* of all the ins and outs of barrack life, had learned to speak very much better than when Ferrers had rescued him out of Frisco's cruel hands; could already read a page fairly well, if the words were not too long, and could write his own name legibly by dint of sprawling his left leg well out and lolling some two inches of his tongue out of the mouth which was not nearly so pinched and tight as it had been a fortnight ago.

"Ah! he's all very smart and that just now," said Hartog one day to Bootles; "but wait a few months until the change has had time to work. He'll get fat, and then where will your nice smart lad be? Simply not worth his salt."

But Tom never did get fat, not even plump. He ate well and heartily, but though his lips grew less tight and his blue eyes rather less anxious and bright—less unnaturally bright, I should say—he never came to be anything but a skinny slip of a lad, with a pinched pale face and a deadly sharp tongue, and he did not seem to grow at all. No one was sorry for that. Neither Bootles nor Terry wished him any taller or heavier. The lad himself boasted of his small size and weight. He had no further ambitions—he had, in fact, reached the summit of his hopes and desires. Capt. Ferrers needed a light-weight about his horses, and very often a sharp groom about himself. Tom supplied both needs to a nicety. He had no desire to grow into a man, because he was perfectly happy as Capt. Ferrers' boy. He had known rough weather, and now that he had got into a port which seemed only suited for small craft he was not anxious to go into a th[illegible]

[illegible] Thus more than two years passed away, and many changes came about in the Scarlet Lancers, such changes as do come about in a regiment during so long a space of time. A very graceful poet sings touchingly and tenderly upon that theme:

> All are scattered now, and fled;
> Some are married, some are dead.

It was true of the Scarlet Lancers, as of the circle of life—and among the married ones was Bootles!

But the tale of Bootles' love and marriage has been told already in the story called "Bootles' Baby." It is enough to say here that he married the widow of a brother-officer, a lady, who had one little child, whom, for other reasons than for the mother's sake, Bootles loved as his own flesh. But though he married he did not leave the service; he was, in fact, too thoroughly and really at heart a soldier to entertain that idea for a moment, and his wife, Mrs. Bootles, as the Scarlet Lancers called her, was more than content to do whatever pleased her good and handsome husband best.

Lacy was still in the regiment; in command of a troop now, but otherwise unchanged. The same soft speech, the same gentle manners, the same kind heart—not married, but waiting, as he always said from the first he should wait, for Ferrers' little "Mignon." Terry was still Capt. Ferrers' head groom, and Tom Snow had positively not grown an inch.

And then there arose throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world rumors that affairs were what the young subalterns in the Scarlet Lancers called "uncommonly groggy in the east," and very soon, from being thus lightly and carelessly termed "very groggy," affairs in the east began to assume a serious aspect; indeed, so serious, in truth, that they soon resolved themselves into orders for that regiment to hold itself in readiness for active service.

Next came the news of the bombardment of Alexandria, and then the Scarlet Lancers got their final orders, and the whole regiment was in a state of exultation and delight.

It is true that down in the very lowest depths of their hearts there lay many an anxious thought and care for those who must be left behind; many a doubt if the glory which might come was worth all the bloodshed and misery which it must cost; but on the surface, the bearing of each and all was fearless and gay; hope rose uppermost, and cost was set aside as a thing of naught.

There was a vast amount of chaff over the first appearance of the new uniforms—the serge tunics, with their heavily wadded spine protectors; the rough boots, with their ample leg bandages, and all the other paraphernalia ingeniously contrived to ward off the ill effects of the treacherous Egyptian climate.

Lacy expressed himself as most highly delighted with his great goggle spectacles, and walked about the barrack square wearing them for hours after they came into his possession—by way, he said, of getting used to the feeling of them.

And then came the last awful morning, a morning dull and gray, with drizzling mist and rain, the Scarlet Lancers sailed away to the mockingly gay strains of "The Girl I Leave Behind Me," some to win honor and glory, indeed, but all to run the risk of coming home again maimed and shattered, or, perhaps, when the war should be all over, to lie, the very flower of a great nation, rotting in Egyptian soil.

CHAPTER III.

There was very little of bravado gayety when the good ship Clyde slipped adown the channel that night. Officers and men alike were very quiet, and Tom Snow crept softly in and out of the cabin shared by his master with Lacy and Hartog, and laid out his mess things with silent and reverent sympathy for the gravity on that master's face, for Bootles had not, as yet, got over the agony he felt as he encountered the yearning misery in his wife's beautiful eyes, and as Mignon's parting sobs fell upon his ears. In truth, it was one of the three most bitter days that ever cast their shadow over the brightness of his pleasant and sunny life.

For himself, young Tom had no feelings save those of the wildest exultation and delight. Until the last moment he had never dared to think it possible he could accompany his master on the expedition. Night after night he had watered his pillow with tears at the thought of being left behind, and then—well, of course he was very sorry for the cause, and he pulled as long a face over the misfortune as anybody, though the young monkey's heart was beating and throbbing with joy at the chance it gave him. This was how the chance occurred. The very day before the regiment was to leave its quarters, Terry fell upon the stairs leading to one of the troop rooms, and slipped his knee cap.

Going was for him out of the question, and not to be thought of; in fact, nobody did think of it for a moment. And then Bootles had to cast about in order to find somebody suitable to fill Terry's place, for Terry, although he was in reality a groom, yet was accustomed to do much about his master's person.

"I'll take young Houp-La," he said suddenly to Hirs. Bootles, after he had gone over in his mind