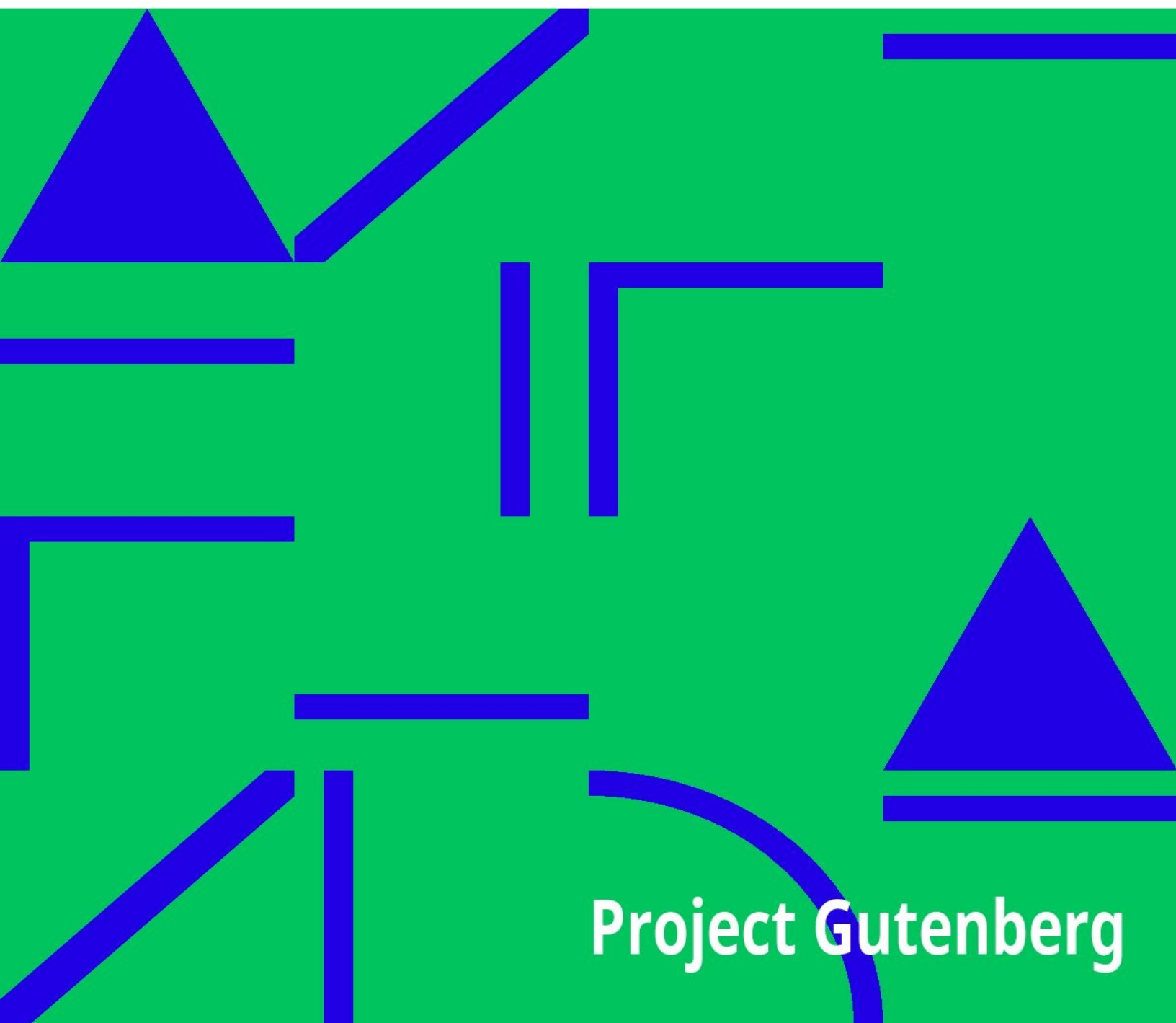


An Echo Of Antietam

1898

Edward Bellamy



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I

The air was tremulous with farewells. The regiment, recruited within sight of the steeples of Waterville, and for three months in camp just outside the city, was to march the next morning. A series of great battles had weakened the Federal armies, and the authorities at Washington had ordered all available men to the front.

The camp was to be broken up at an early hour, after which the regiment would march through the city to the depot to take the cars. The streets along the route of the march were already being decorated with flags and garlands. The city that afternoon was full of soldiers enjoying their last leave of absence. The liquor shops were crowded with parties of them drinking with their friends, while others in threes and fours, with locked arms, paraded the streets singing patriotic songs, sometimes in rather maudlin voices, for to-day in every saloon a soldier might enter, citizens vied for the privilege of treating him to the best in the house. No man in a blue coat was suffered to pay for anything.

For the most part, however, the men were sober enough over their leave-taking. One saw everywhere soldiers and civilians, strolling in pairs, absorbed in earnest talk. They are brothers, maybe, who have come away from the house to be alone with each other, while they talk of family affairs and exchange last charges and promises as to what is to be done if anything happens. Or perhaps they are business partners, and the one who has put the country's business before his own is giving his last counsels as to how the store or the shop shall be managed in his absence. Many of the blue-clad men have women with them, and these are the couples that the people oftenest turn to look at. The girl who has a soldier lover is the envy of her companions to-day as she walks by his side. Her proud eyes challenge all who come, saying, "See, this is my hero. I am the one he loves."

You could easily tell when it was a wife and not a sweetheart whom the soldier had with him. There was no challenge in the eyes of the wife. Young romance shed none of its glamour on the sacrifice she was making for her native land. It was only because they could not bear to sit any longer looking at each other in the house that she and her husband had come out to walk.

In the residence parts of the town family groups were gathered on shady piazzas, a blue-coated figure the centre of each. They were trying to talk

cheerfully, making an effort even to laugh a little.

Now and then one of the women stole unobserved from the circle, but her bravely smiling face as she presently returned gave no inkling of the flood of tears that had eased her heart in some place apart. The young soldier himself was looking a little pale and nervous with all his affected good spirits, and it was safe to guess that he was even then thinking how often this scene would come before him afterwards, by the camp-fire and on the eve of battle.

In the village of Upton, some four or five miles out of Waterville, on a broad piazza at the side of a house on the main street, a group of four persons were seated around a tea-table.

The centre of interest of this group, as of so many others that day, was a soldier. He looked not over twenty-five, with dark blue eyes, dark hair cut close to his head, and a mustache trimmed crisply in military fashion. His uniform set off to advantage an athletic figure of youthful slender-ness, and his bronzed complexion told of long days of practice on the drill-ground in the school of the company and the battalion. He wore the shoulder-straps of a second lieutenant.

On one side of the soldier sat the Rev. Mr. Morton, his cousin, and on the other Miss Bertha Morton, a kindly faced, middle-aged lady, who was her brother's housekeeper and the hostess of this occasion.

The fourth member of the party was a girl of nineteen or twenty. She was a very pretty girl, and although to-day her pallid cheeks and red and swollen eyelids would to other eyes have detracted somewhat from her charms, it was certain that they did not make her seem less adorable to the young officer, for he was her lover, and was to march with the regiment in the morning.

Lieutenant Philip King was a lawyer, and by perseverance and native ability had worked up a fair practice for so young a man in and around Upton. When he volunteered, he had to make up his mind to leave this carefully gathered clientage to scatter, or to be filched from him by less patriotic rivals; but it may be well believed that this seemed to him a little thing compared with leaving Grace Roberts, with the chance of never returning to make her his wife. If, indeed, it had been for him to say, he would have placed his happiness beyond hazard by marrying her before the regiment marched; nor would she have been averse, but her mother, an invalid widow, took a sensible rather than a sentimental view of the case. If he were killed, she said, a wife would do him no good; and if he came home again, Grace would be waiting for him, and that ought to satisfy a reasonable man. It had to satisfy an unreasonable one. The Robertses had always lived just beyond the garden from the parsonage, and

Grace, who from a little girl had been a great pet of the childless minister and his sister, was almost as much at home there as in her mother's house. When Philip fell in love with her, the Mortons were delighted. They could have wished nothing better for either. From the first Miss Morton had done all she could to make matters smooth for the lovers, and the present little farewell banquet was but the last of many meetings she had prepared for them at the parsonage.

Philip had come out from camp on a three-hours' leave that afternoon, and would have to report again at half-past seven. It was nearly that hour now, though still light, the season being midsummer. There had been an effort on the part of all to keep up a cheerful tone; but as the time of the inevitable separation drew near, the conversation had been more and more left to the minister and his sister, who, with observations sometimes a little forced, continued to fend off silence and the demoralization it would be likely to bring to their young friends. Grace had been the first to drop out of the talking, and Philip's answers, when he was addressed, grew more and more at random, as the meetings of his eyes with his sweetheart's became more frequent and lasted longer.

"He will be the handsomest officer in the regiment, that's one comfort. Won't he, Grace?" said Miss Morton cheerily.

The girl nodded and smiled faintly. Her eyes were brimming, and the twitching of her lips from time to time betrayed how great was the effort with which she kept her self-command.

"Yes," said Mr. Morton; "but though he looks very well now, it is nothing to the imposing appearance he will present when he comes back with a colonel's shoulder-straps. You should be thinking of that, Grace."

"I expect we shall hear from him every day," said Miss Morton. "He will have no excuse for not writing with all those envelopes stamped and addressed, with blank paper in them, which Grace has given him. You should always have three or four in your coat pocket, Phil."

The young man nodded.

"I suppose for the most part we shall learn of you through Grace; but you mustn't forget us entirely, my boy," said Mr. Morton. "We shall want to hear from you directly now and then."

"Yes; I'll be sure to write," Philip replied.

"I suppose it will be time enough to see the regiment pass if we are in our places by nine o'clock," suggested Miss Morton, after a silence.

"I think so," said her brother. "It is a great affair to break camp, and I don't

believe the march will begin till after that time.”

“James has got us one of the windows of Ray & Seymour's offices, you know, Philip,” resumed Miss Morton; “which one did you say, James?”

“The north one.”

“Yes, the north one,” she resumed. “They say every window on Main Street along the route of the regiment is rented. Grace will be with us, you know. You must n't forget to look up at us as you go by—as if the young man were likely to!”

He was evidently not now listening to her at all. His eyes were fastened upon the girl's opposite him, and they seemed to have quite forgotten the others. Miss Morton and her brother exchanged compassionate glances. Tears were in the lady's eyes. A clock in the sitting-room began to strike:

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.”

Philip started.

“What time is that?” he asked, a little huskily. No one replied at once. Then Mr. Morton said:

“I am afraid it struck seven, my boy.”

“I must leave in ten minutes then,” said the young man, rising from the table. The rest followed his example.

“I wonder if the buggy will be in time?” said he.

“It is at the gate,” replied Miss Morton. “I heard it drive up some time ago.”

Unmindful of the others now, Philip put his arm about Grace's waist and drew her away to the end of the piazza and thence out into the garden.

“Poor young things,” murmured Miss Morton, the tears running down her cheeks as she looked after them. “It is pitiful, James, to see how they suffer.”

“Yes,” said the minister; “and there are a great many just such scenes to-day. Ah, well, as St. Paul says, we see as yet but in part.”

Passing in and out among the shrubbery, and presently disappearing from the sympathetic eyes upon the piazza, the lovers came to a little summer-house, and there they entered. Taking her wrists in his hands, he held her away from him, and his eyes went slowly over her from head to foot, as if he would impress upon his mind an image that absence should not have power to dim.

“You are so beautiful,” he said, “that in this moment, when I ought to have all my courage, you make me feel that I am a madman to leave you for the sake of any cause on earth. The future to most men is but a chance of happiness, and

when they risk it they only risk a chance. In staking their lives, they only stake a lottery ticket, which would probably draw a blank. But my ticket has drawn a capital prize. I risk not the chance, but the certainty, of happiness. I believe I am a fool, and if I am killed, that will be the first thing they will say to me on the other side.”

“Don't talk of that, Phil. Oh, don't talk of being killed!”

“No, no; of course not!” he exclaimed. “Don't fret about that; I shall not be killed. I've no notion of being killed. But what a fool I am to waste these last moments staring at you when I might be kissing you, my love, my love!” And clasping her in his arms, he covered her face with kisses.

She began to sob convulsively.

“Don't, darling; don't! Don't make it so hard for me,” he whispered hoarsely.

“Oh, do let me cry,” she wailed. “It was so hard for me to hold back all the time we were at table. I must cry, or my heart will break. Oh, my own dear Phil, what if I should never see you again! Oh! Oh!”

“Nonsense, darling,” he said, crowding down the lump that seemed like iron in his throat, and making a desperate effort to keep his voice steady. “You will see me again, never doubt it. Don't I tell you I am coming back? The South cannot hold out much longer. Everybody says so. I shall be home in a year, and then you will be my wife, to be God's Grace to me all the rest of my life. Our happiness will be on interest till then; ten per cent, a month at least, compound interest, piling up every day. Just think of that, dear; don't let yourself think of anything else.”

“Oh, Phil, how I love you!” she cried, throwing her arms around his neck in a passion of tenderness. “Nobody is like you. Nobody ever was. Surely God will not part us. Surely He will not. He is too good.”

“No, dear, He will not. Some day I shall come back. It will not be long. Perhaps I shall find you waiting for me in this same little summer-house. Let us think of that. It was here, you know, we found out each other's secret that day.”

“I had found out yours long before,” she said, faintly smiling.

“Time 's up, Phil.” It was Mr. Morton's voice calling to them from the piazza.

“I must go, darling. Good-by.”

“Oh, no, not yet; not quite yet,” she wailed, clinging to him. “Why, we have been here but a few moments. It can't be ten minutes yet.”

Under the influence of that close, passionate embrace, those clinging kisses and mingling tears, there began to come over Philip a feeling of weakness, of

fainting courage, a disposition to cry out, "Nothing can be so terrible as this. I will not bear it; I will not go." By a tyrannical effort of will, against which his whole nature cried out, he unwound her arms from his neck and said in a choked voice:—

"Darling, this is harder than any battle I shall have to fight, but this is what I enlisted for. I must go."

He had reached the door of the summer-house, not daring for honor's sake to look back, when a heartbroken cry smote his ear.

"You have n't kissed me good-by!"

He had kissed her a hundred times, but these kisses she apparently distinguished from the good-by kiss. He came back, and taking her again in his embrace, kissed her lips, her throat, her bosom, and then once more their lips met, and in that kiss of parting which plucks the heart up by the roots.

How strong must be the barrier between one soul and another that they do not utterly merge in moments like that, turning the agony of parting to the bliss of blended being!

Pursued by the sound of her desolate sobbing, he fled away.

The stable-boy held the dancing horse at the gate, and Mr. Morton and his sister stood waiting there.

"Good-by, Phil, till we see you again," said Miss Morton, kissing him tenderly. "We 'll take good care of her for you."

"Will you please go to her now?" he said huskily. "She is in the summer-house. For God's sake try to comfort her."

"Yes, poor boy, I will," she answered. He shook hands with Mr. Morton and jumped into the buggy.

"I 'll get a furlough and be back in a few months, maybe. Be sure to tell her that," he said.

The stable-boy stood aside; the mettlesome horse gave a plunge and started off at a three-minute gait. The boy drew out his watch and observed: "He hain't got but fifteen minutes to git to camp in, but he 'll do it. The mare 's a stepper, and Phil King knows how to handle the ribbons."

The buggy vanished in a cloud of dust around the next turn in the road. The stable-boy strode whistling down the street, the minister went to his study, and Miss Morton disappeared in the shrubbery in the direction of the summer-house.

II

Early next morning the country roads leading into Waterville were covered with carts and wagons and carriages loaded with people coming into town to see the regiment off. The streets were hung with flags and spanned with decorated arches bearing patriotic inscriptions. Red, white, and blue streamers hung in festoons from building to building and floated from cornices. The stores and places of business were all closed, the sidewalks were packed with people in their Sunday clothes, and the windows and balconies were lined with gazers long before it was time for the regiment to appear. Everybody—men, women, and children—wore the national colors in cockades or rosettes, while many young girls were dressed throughout in red, white, and blue. The city seemed tricked out for some rare gala-day, but the grave faces of the expectant throng, and the subdued and earnest manner which extended even to the older children, stamped this as no ordinary holiday.

After hours of patient waiting, at last the word passes from mouth to mouth, “They are coming!” Vehicles are quickly driven out of the way, and in a general hush all eyes are turned towards the head of the street. Presently there is a burst of martial music, and the regiment comes wheeling round the corner into view and fills the wide street from curb to curb with its broad front. As the blue river sweeps along, the rows of polished bayonets, rising and falling with the swinging tread of the men, are like interminable ranks of foam-crested waves rolling in upon the shore. The imposing mass, with its rhythmic movement, gives the impression of a single organism. One forgets to look for the individuals in it, forgets that there are individuals. Even those who have brothers, sons, lovers there, for a moment almost forget them in the impression of a mighty whole. The mind is slow to realize that this great dragon, so terrible in its beauty, emitting light as it moves from a thousand burnished scales, with flaming crest proudly waving in the van, is but an aggregation of men singly so feeble.

The hearts of the lookers-on as they gaze are swelling fast. An afflatus of heroism given forth by this host of self-devoted men communicates itself to the most stolid spectators. The booming of the drum fills the brain, and the blood in the veins leaps to its rhythm. The unearthly gayety of the fife, like the sweet, shrill song of a bird soaring above the battle, infects the nerves till the idea of death brings a scornful smile to the lips. Eyes glaze with rapturous tears as they

rest upon the flag. There is a thrill of voluptuous sweetness in the thought of dying for it. Life seems of value only as it gives the poorest something to sacrifice. It is dying that makes the glory of the world, and all other employments seem but idle while the regiment passes.

The time for farewells is gone by. The lucky men at the ends of the ranks have indeed an opportunity without breaking step to exchange an occasional handshake with a friend on the sidewalk, or to snatch a kiss from wife or sweetheart, but those in the middle of the line can only look their farewells. Now and then a mother intrusts her baby to a file-leader to be passed along from hand to hand till it reaches the father, to be sent back with a kiss, or, maybe, perched aloft on his shoulder, to ride to the depot, crowing at the music and clutching at the gleaming bayonets. At every such touch of nature the people cheer wildly. From every window and balcony the ladies shower garlands upon the troops.

Where is Grace? for this is the Upton company which is passing now. Yonder she stands on a balcony, between Mr. Morton and his sister. She is very pale and the tears are streaming down her cheeks, but her face is radiant. She is smiling through her tears, as if there was no such thing on earth as fear or sorrow. She has looked forward to this ordeal with harrowing expectations, only to find herself at the trying moment seized upon and lifted above all sense of personal affliction by the passion of self-devotion with which the air is electric. Her face as she looks down upon her lover is that of a priestess in the ecstasy of sacrifice. He is saluting with his sword. Now he has passed. With a great sob she turns away. She does not care for the rest of the pageant. Her patriotism has suddenly gone. The ecstasy of sacrifice is over. She is no longer a priestess, but a brokenhearted girl, who only asks to be led away to some place where she can weep till her lover returns.

III

There was to be a great battle the next day. The two armies had been long manoeuvring for position, and now they stood like wrestlers who have selected their holds and, with body braced against body, knee against knee, wait for the signal to begin the struggle. There had been during the afternoon some brisk fighting, but a common desire to postpone the decisive contest till the morrow had prevented the main forces from becoming involved. Philip's regiment had thus far only been engaged in a few trifling skirmishes, barely enough to stir the blood. This was to be its first battle, and the position to which it had been allotted promised a bloody baptism in the morning. The men were in excellent heart, but as night settled down, there was little or no merriment to be heard about the camp-fires. Most were gathered in groups, discussing in low tones the chances of the morrow. Some, knowing that every fibre of muscle would be needed for the work before them, had wisely gone to sleep, while here and there a man, heedless of the talk going on about him, was lying on his back staring up at the darkening sky, thinking.

As the twilight deepened, Philip strolled to the top of a little knoll just out of the camp and sat down, with a vague notion of casting up accounts a little in view of the final settlement which very possibly might come for him next day. But the inspiration of the scene around him soon diverted his mind from personal engrossments. Some distance down the lines he could see the occasional flash of a gun, where a battery was lazily shelling a piece of woods which it was desirable to keep the enemy from occupying during the night. A burning barn in that direction made a flare on the sky. Over behind the wooded hills where the Confederates lay, rockets were going up, indicating the exchange of signals and the perfecting of plans which might mean defeat and ruin to him and his the next day. Behind him, within the Federal lines, clouds of dust, dimly outlined against the glimmering landscape, betrayed the location of the roads along which artillery, cavalry, infantry were hurrying eagerly forward to take their assigned places for the morrow's work.

Who said that men fear death? Who concocted that fable for old wives? He should have stood that night with Philip in the midst of a host of one hundred and twenty-five thousand men in the full flush and vigor of life, calmly and deliberately making ready at dawn to receive death in its most horrid forms at

one another's hands. It is in vain that Religion invests the tomb with terror, and Philosophy, shuddering, averts her face; the nations turn from these gloomy teachers to storm its portals in exultant hosts, battering them wide enough for thousands to charge through abreast. The heroic instinct of humanity with its high contempt of death is wiser and truer, never let us doubt, than superstitious terrors or philosophic doubts. It testifies to a conviction, deeper than reason, that man is greater than his seeming self; to an underlying consciousness that his mortal life is but an accident of his real existence, the fashion of a day, to be lightly worn and gayly doffed at duty's call.

What a pity it truly is that the tonic air of battlefields—the air that Philip breathed that night before Antietam—cannot be gathered up and preserved as a precious elixir to reinvigorate the atmosphere in times of peace, when men grow faint of heart and cowardly, and quake at thought of death.

The soldiers huddled in their blankets on the ground slept far more soundly that night before the battle than their men-folk and women-folk in their warm beds at home. For them it was a night of watching, a vigil of prayers and tears. The telegraph in those days made of the nation an intensely sensitive organism, with nerves a thousand miles long. Ere its echoes had died away, every shot fired at the front had sent a tremor to the anxious hearts at home. The newspapers and bulletin boards in all the towns and cities of the North had announced that a great battle would surely take place the next day, and, as the night closed in, a mighty cloud of prayer rose from innumerable firesides, the self-same prayer from each, that he who had gone from that home might survive the battle, whoever else must fall.

The wife, lest her own appeal might fail, taught her cooing baby to lisp the father's name, thinking that surely the Great Father's heart would not be able to resist a baby's prayer. The widowed mother prayed that if it were consistent with God's will he would spare her son. She laid her heart, pierced through with many sorrows, before Him. She had borne so much, life had been so hard, her boy was all she had to show for so much endured,—might not this cup pass? Pale, impassioned maids, kneeling by their virgin beds, wore out the night with an importunity that would not be put off. Sure in their great love and their little knowledge that no case could be like theirs, they beseeched God with bitter weeping for their lovers' lives, because, forsooth, they could not bear it if hurt came to them. The answers to many thousands of these agonizing appeals of maid and wife and mother were already in the enemy's cartridge-boxes.

IV

The day came. The dispatches in the morning papers stated that the armies would probably be engaged from an early hour.

Who that does not remember those battle-summers can realize from any telling how the fathers and mothers, the wives and sisters and sweethearts at home, lived through the days when it was known that a great battle was going on at the front in which their loved ones were engaged? It was very quiet in the house on those days of battle. All spoke in hushed voices and stepped lightly. The children, too small to understand the meaning of the shadow on the home, felt it and took their noisy sports elsewhere. There was little conversation, except as to when definite news might be expected. The household work dragged sadly, for though the women sought refuge from thought in occupation, they were constantly dropping whatever they had in hand to rush away to their chambers to face the presentiment, perhaps suddenly borne in upon them with the force of a conviction, that they might be called on to bear the worst. The table was set for the regular meals, but there was little pretense of eating. The eyes of all had a far-off expression, and they seemed barely to see one another. There was an intent, listening look upon their faces, as if they were hearkening to the roar of the battle a thousand miles away.

Many pictures of battles have been painted, but no true one yet, for the pictures contain only men. The women are unaccountably left out. We ought to see not alone the opposing lines of battle writhing and twisting in a death embrace, the batteries smoking and flaming, the hurricanes of cavalry, but innumerable women also, spectral forms of mothers, wives, sweethearts, clinging about the necks of the advancing soldiers, vainly trying to shield them with their bosoms, extending supplicating hands to the foe, raising eyes of anguish to Heaven. The soldiers, grim-faced, with battle-lighted eyes, do not see the ghostly forms that throng them, but shoot and cut and stab across and through them as if they were not there,—yes, through them, for few are the balls and bayonets that reach their marks without traversing some of these devoted breasts. Spectral, alas, is their guardianship, but real are their wounds and deadly as any the combatants receive.

Soon after breakfast on the day of the battle Grace came across to the parsonage, her swollen eyes and pallid face telling of a sleepless night. She

could not bear her mother's company that day, for she knew that she had never greatly liked Philip. Miss Morton was very tender and sympathetic. Grace was a little comforted by Mr. Morton's saying that commonly great battles did not open much before noon. It was a respite to be able to think that probably up to that moment at least no harm had come to Philip. In the early afternoon the minister drove into Waterville to get the earliest bulletins at the "Banner" office, leaving the two women alone.

The latter part of the afternoon a neighbor who had been in Waterville drove by the house, and Miss Morton called to him to know if there were any news yet. He drew a piece of paper from his pocket, on which he had scribbled the latest bulletin before the "Banner" office, and read as follows: "The battle opened with a vigorous attack by our right. The enemy was forced back, stubbornly contesting every inch of ground. General ——'s division is now bearing the brunt of the fight and is suffering heavily. The result is yet uncertain."

The division mentioned was the one in which Philip's regiment was included. "Is suffering heavily,"—those were the words. There was something fearful in the way the present tense brought home to Grace a sense of the battle as then actually in progress. It meant that while she sat there on the shady piazza with the drowsy hum of the bees in her ears, looking out on the quiet lawn where the house cat, stretched on the grass, kept a sleepy eye on the birds as they flitted in the branches of the apple-trees, Philip might be facing a storm of lead and iron, or, maybe, blent in some desperate hand-to-hand struggle, was defending his life—her life—against murderous cut and thrust.

To begin to pray for his safety was not to dare to cease, for to cease would be to withdraw a sort of protection—all, alas I she could give—and abandon him to his enemies. If she had been watching over him from above the battle, an actual witness of the carnage going on that afternoon on the far-off field, she could scarcely have endured a more harrowing suspense from moment to moment. Overcome with the agony, she threw herself on the sofa in the sitting-room and lay quivering, with her face buried in the pillow, while Miss Morton sat beside her, stroking her hair and saying such feeble, soothing words as she might.

It is always hard, and for ardent temperaments almost impossible, to hold the mind balanced in a state of suspense, yielding overmuch neither to hope nor to fear, under circumstances like these. As a relief to the torture which such a state of tension ends in causing, the mind at length, if it cannot abandon itself to hope, embraces even despair. About five o'clock Miss Morton was startled by an exceeding bitter cry. Grace was sitting upon the sofa. "Oh, Miss Morton!" she cried, bursting into tears which before she had not been able to shed, "he is

dead!”

“Grace! Grace! what do you mean?”

“He is dead, I know he is dead!” wailed the girl; and then she explained that while from moment to moment she had sent up prayers for him, every breath a cry to God, she suddenly had been unable to pray more, and this she felt was a sign that petition for his life was now vain. Miss Morton strove to convince her that this was but an effect of overwrought nerves, but with slight success.

In the early evening Mr. Morton returned with the latest news the telegraph had brought. The full scope of the result was not yet known. The advantage had probably remained with the National forces, although the struggle had been one of those close and stubborn ones, with scanty laurels for the victors, to be expected when men of one race meet in battle. The losses on both sides had been enormous, and the report was confirmed that Philip's division had been badly cut up.

The parsonage was but one of thousands of homes in the land where no lamps were lighted that evening, the members of the household sitting together in the dark,—silent, or talking in low tones of the far-away star-lighted battlefield, the anguish of the wounded, the still heaps of the dead.

Nevertheless, when at last Grace went home she was less entirely despairing than in the afternoon. Mr. Morton, in his calm, convincing way, had shown her the groundlessness of her impression that Philip was certainly dead, and had enabled her again to entertain hope. It no longer rose, indeed, to the height of a belief that he had escaped wholly scathless. In face of the terrible tidings, that would have been too presumptuous. But perhaps he had been only wounded. Yesterday the thought would have been insupportable, but now she was eager to make this compromise with Providence. She was distinctly affected by the curious superstition that if we voluntarily concede something to fate, while yet the facts are not known, we gain a sort of equitable assurance against a worse thing. It was settled, she told herself, that she was not to be overcome or even surprised to hear that Philip was wounded,—slightly wounded. She was no better than other women, that he should be wholly spared.

The paper next morning gave many names of officers who had fallen, but Philip's was not among them. The list was confessedly incomplete; nevertheless, the absence of his name was reassuring. Grace went across the garden after breakfast to talk with Miss Morton about the news and the auspicious lack of news. Her friend's cheerful tone infused her with fresh courage. To one who has despaired, a very little hope goes to the head Eke wine to the brain of a faster,

and, though still very tremulous, Grace could even smile a little now and was almost cheerful. Secretly already she was beginning to play false with fate, and, in flat repudiation of her last night's compact, to indulge the hope that her soldier had not been even wounded. But this was only at the bottom of her heart. She did not own to herself that she really did it. She felt a little safer not to break the bargain yet.

About eleven o'clock in the forenoon Mr. Morton came in. His start and look of dismay on seeing Grace indicated that he had expected to find his sister alone. He hastily attempted to conceal an open telegram which he held in his hand, but it was too late. Grace had already seen it, and whatever the tidings it might contain, there was no longer any question of holding them back or extenuating them. Miss Morton, after one look at her brother's face, silently came to the girl's side and put her arms around her waist. "Christ, our Saviour," she murmured, "for thy name's sake, help her now." Then the minister said:—

"Try to be brave, try to bear it worthily of him; for, my poor little girl, your sacrifice has been accepted. He fell in a charge at the head of his men."

V

Philip's body was brought home for burial, and the funeral was a great event in the village. Business of all kinds was suspended, and all the people united in making of the day a solemn patriotic festival. Mr. Morton preached the funeral sermon.

"Oh, talk about the country," sobbed Grace, when he asked her if there was anything in particular she would like him to speak of.

"For pity's sake don't let me feel sorry now that I gave him up for the Union. Don't leave me now to think it would have been better if I had not let him go."

So he preached of the country, as ministers sometimes did preach in those days, making it very plain that in a righteous cause men did well to die for their native land and their women did well to give them up. Expounding the lofty wisdom of self-sacrifice, he showed how truly it was said that "whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life... shall find it," and how none make such rich profit out of their lives as the heroes who seem to throw them away.

They had come, he told the assembled people, to mourn no misadventure, no misfortune; this dead soldier was not pitiable. He was no victim of a tear-compelling fate. No broken shaft typified his career. He was rather one who had done well for himself, a wise young merchant of his blood, who having seen a way to barter his life at incredible advantage, at no less a rate indeed than a man's for a nation's, had not let slip so great an opportunity.

So he went on, still likening the life of a man to the wares of a shopkeeper, worth to him only what they can be sold for and a loss if overkept, till those who listened began to grow ill at ease in presence of that flag-draped coffin, and were vaguely troubled because they still lived.

Then he spoke of those who had been bereaved. This soldier, he said, like his comrades, had staked for his country not only his own life but the earthly happiness of others also, having been fully empowered by them to do so. Some had staked with their own lives the happiness of parents, some that of wives and children, others maybe the hopes of maidens pledged to them. In offering up their lives to their country they had laid with them upon the altar these other lives which were bound up with theirs, and the same fire of sacrifice had consumed them both. A few days before, in the storm of battle, those who had

gone forth had fulfilled their share of the joint sacrifice. In a thousand homes, with tears and the anguish of breaking hearts, those who had sent them forth were that day fulfilling theirs. Let them now in their extremity seek support in the same spirit of patriotic devotion which had upheld their heroes in the hour of death. As they had been lifted above fear by the thought that it was for their country they were dying, not less should those who mourned them find inspiration in remembering it was for the nation's sake that their tears were shed, and for the country that their hearts were broken. It had been appointed that half in blood of men and half in women's tears the ransom of the people should be paid, so that their sorrow was not in vain, but for the healing of the nation.

It behooved these, therefore, to prove worthy of their high calling of martyrdom, and while they must needs weep, not to weep as other women wept, with hearts bowed down, but rather with uplifted faces, adopting and ratifying, though it might be with breaking hearts, this exchange they had made of earthly happiness for the life of their native land. So should they honor those they mourned, and be joined with them not only in sacrifice but in the spirit of sacrifice.

So it was in response to the appeal of this stricken girl before him that the minister talked of the country, and to such purpose was it that the piteous thing she had dreaded, the feeling, now when it was forever too late, that it would have been better if she had kept her lover back, found no place in her heart. There was, indeed, had she known it, no danger at all that she would be left to endure that, so long as she dreaded it, for the only prayer that never is unanswered is the prayer to be lifted above self. So to pray and so to wish is but to cease to resist the divine gravitations ever pulling at the soul. As the minister discoursed of the mystic gain of self-sacrifice, the mystery of which he spoke was fulfilled in her heart. She appeared to stand in some place overarching life and death, and there was made partaker of an exultation whereof if religion and philosophy might but catch and hold the secret, their ancient quest were over.

Gazing through streaming eyes upon the coffin of her lover, she was able freely to consent to the sacrifice of her own life which he had made in giving up his own.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ECHO OF ANTIETAM ***

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