



"To fling the axe straight and true seemed all the hope that remained."

T

CHINNA.

By MRS. HOBART-HAMPDEN,

Author of 'The Secret Valley,' etc., etc.

(Continued from page 267.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEARER the sound came. Nearer, nearer. The fire was burning somewhat smokily, fighting against a mass of green wood in its midst. But now there came a puff of wind which sent the smoke hither and thither in writhing, curling clouds. And, in amongst those clouds, on the further side of the fire, Chinna could glimpse something which seemed almost part of them, and which had yet, surely, a form more fixed.

The flames steadied as the wind passed, and shot upwards in spears of light. And, between the spears, framed in them gorgeously, stood out the body of the tigress, sinuous and terrible. Her head was lowered, and her angry, searching eyes were fixed on the entrance to the cave.

Across the fire the tigress glowered at those whom she had tracked so far. Across the flames which now flared so high, but which, presently, must sink, for of spare fuel there was no great quantity. The country was so open it had not seemed likely the fire would be needed as a precaution. It had been lit for warmth and comfort merely.

But, as yet, the glow and glare held the tigress in check. She could not and she dared not cross the fire at its present height. Down upon her haunches she sank, and stared across the flames with jewel-bright eyes. And Chinna, as he answered that look, told himself that his question was answered also. The spirits had wholly turned against him; no shadow of doubt remained. Not content with driving him from his forests, they had sent this, their messenger, against him to destroy him. She had tracked the party doubtless by the smell of the tiger-skin which still clung to them. Yet why had she not remained by the headman's house, where Chinna had purposely left the skin itself? He could not know that the villagers had burnt both skin and house together, convinced that an evil spell rested on both. All ignorant of this, it seemed to Chinna that the presence of the tigress was a visible proof of the anger of those he had served.

That the tigress would have no pity now Chinna was very sure. He, who understood all wild things so well, could fathom her temper exactly. When first she thought she had found her mate, it had been possible to frighten her; to daunt her somewhat, since she was not sure of her discovery. But now that she had tracked him once more, as she believed, she would be thwarted no longer. She burned to sweep from her path everything, every one who kept him from her. She was aglow with hate against all who intervened. She yearned to spring into the cave; to strike with her cruel claws right and left. To tear the flesh of her enemies with her teeth. A terrible anger ruled her utterly; and, between that anger and those she would make her victims, was the fire only. Chinna's poisoned arrows had been taken from him with his other weapons by the villagers. With a sinking heart he realised these facts. And as, one by one, they sank deep into his consciousness, almost he was tempted to despair—to submit dully to the cruel fate he thought the spirits had dealt him.

If he had been alone, perchance Chinna would have surrendered. If Mrs. Chinna only had been with him, he might have reasoned that the death he was willing to accept, she ought to accept meekly also.

Almost he had reached this point when Frederick turned in his sleep, and, all unconscious that he did so, called loudly, 'Chinna! Chinna!' And, at the call, with a rush the little man's courage came back to him. He would not yield. At least he would do his best to save the children who had saved him so lately. At least the spirits had no right to punish them also. And he stood upright with a mighty shout, and laid his hands upon a piece of smouldering wood and flung it at the tigress. And Mrs. Chinna and Shib Ram and the children woke at the noise and added their voices to his. The cave rang with the tumult and the echo, and for a moment the tigress stood hesitating, her head swinging low, while she growled threateningly.

Chinna had all his wits about him now, and quickly he began to build up the fire. It was burning most brightly in the centre; at either end the heat was less fierce, and to right or left a gap might soon form through which the tigress could enter. She seemed to guess that this was so, for she began to shift her position a little, edging to her left, which was the right of the cave. And she slid a paw out as though she would test the glowing ashes, and judge if she dared to cross them. But at once Chinna reinforced the weak spot with a fresh supply of wood, and, baffled, the tigress drew back again, and again returned to the attack. And she let out a roar of defiance which set the children and Mrs. Chinna and Shib Ram shivering with their hands pressed close to their ears.

It was the beginning of a veritable siege. First the tigress crept to one side, and then to the other. And ever Chinna faced her, and fed the fire anew, helped by Shib Ram and Brian, while Mrs. Chinna and Nancy and Frederick watched in the background. And from time to time they all shouted together when Chinna gave the word, hoping that the noise might turn the tigress from her purpose. But, though it had daunted her at first, it soon ceased to do so, and she paid no further heed, though still they shouted desperately.

It was as the night died that the fire died with it. It was as the dawn approached that the embers paled, and again the tigress slid a paw forward, and now that paw was not withdrawn. Across the dead ashes she stepped, lifting each pad daintily, and shaking the cinders from it as a cat shakes water from its feet. Slowly she moved as though she took pleasure in prolonging the suspense of those she threatened. She knew, it seemed, that these enemies of hers were wholly at her mercy. She meant that they should know it also.

She stopped as she came to the entrance to the cave, and thrust her great head through. And Chinna's hand went quickly to the little axe in Brian's waistbelt, the axe the villagers had given as part of the reward. He had not dared to throw it sooner, since to wound the tigress would but add to her wrath. But now to fling the axe straight and true seemed all the hope that remained. And straight and true it flew, hit the head of the tigress, but to slide from thence to the ground. The treacherous villagers had in this also been treacherous. The axe-head was of inferior steel, and the edge had curled and turned, and failed to penetrate the thick hide.

But the shock of the blow numbed the tigress for a space. She halted still, shaking her head as though

the axe still clung to it, uttering low, snarling growls. Clear she stood against the red glow of the fire with the night sky for a background.

And now she ceased to growl, and all the world seemed wrapped in a thick and heavy silence. And low she crouched for a spring, her muscles working beneath the supple skin. And as those muscles tightened, all at once the silence was rent by a voice shouting, shouting, shouting. By the thud of a horse's hoofs, galloping, galloping, galloping.

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RICHER THAN HE KNEW.

SO rich was a certain Duke that he had no idea *how* rich he was. He did not know the amount of his income, nor even how many houses he possessed.

One day, when out hunting in the forest of Mixe, in the Pyrenees, he became separated from his friends. He lost his way, and, as night was coming on by the time he reached the edge of the forest, he determined to seek shelter at the first house he came to.

This turned out to be a very fine house indeed. The Duke received a warm welcome.

'Come in, sir!' said the chief of the staff of servants. 'Come in! Our master is absent. In fact, he is never here, but he wishes us to show hospitality to all, just as if he were present.'

The Duke was excellently served. He supped and slept like a king. The next morning, while feeding the servants, he inquired the name of his kind invisible host.

'This,' was the unexpected reply, 'is one of the mansions belonging to the Duke of Medina Sperantina. Although we have never yet seen him (for he seldom honours this neighbourhood with a visit), we love him because he is so generous and so good.'

'Ah, yes, of course!' said the Duke. 'I had forgotten my little house at Mixe. Too bad of me! But I am delighted to find that my servants so faithfully carry out my instructions even in my absence.'

Having expressed his approval by trebling the 'tips' of the astonished servants, the Duke rode off to rejoin his friends, who laughed heartily when he told them that on the preceding night he had slept in his own house without knowing it!

THE BELOVED DOG.

WINNIE WIGMORE is very fond of her little fox-terrier, 'Gyp.' She has loved him more than ever since the memorable summer evening when he so greatly distinguished himself.

Winnie's father was away in France, but she had a dear, kind mother to take care of her, and a delightful old grandfather to be her companion and playmate.

The grandfather had an 'allotment' on a common at some distance from the little house in which he and Winnie and Winnie's mother lived. Every fine day, the grandfather—usually accompanied by Gyp—went to his allotment, in which he took a great interest. He was very successful with his potatoes and scarlet-runners. Every Saturday, when Winnie had a holiday from school, she went with her grandfather and Gyp to the common, where she helped (or thought she helped) with the gardening.

One very fine, sunny Saturday afternoon, the grandfather was so interested in his work that when tea-time came he did not want to go home. Winnie, too, did not wish to go indoors, for it was so pleasant out in the sunshine! But about five o'clock Gyp became very restless and troublesome. He tugged at Winnie's frock, and tried to draw her away. Then he picked up the grandfather's coat, which the old man had thrown down on the ground. Gyp carried the coat in his mouth to its owner, at whose feet he laid it down. Then he sat up and begged, saying as plainly as possible, 'Do put it on!'

'Gyp wants his tea, Grandfather,' said Winnie.

Gyp was exceedingly fond of tea, and it seemed natural enough that he should be thirsty after running about in the heat. He was a 'spoiled' dog. Every one in his home always did what he wanted, and gave him whatever he asked for. So now, as he kept on worrying his two friends, Winnie said with a sigh, 'Well, I suppose we must go.'

'I suppose we must,' said her grandfather, and he meekly put on his coat. Gyp wagged his tail frantically, and barked in triumph. He rushed off in front, pausing now and again to look back and make sure that his friends were following.

When the three reached home, they found tea all ready for them, though Winnie's mother had had *her* tea—for she liked to have it early. A basin of tea was placed on the floor for Gyp. He lapped a little (out of politeness), but he did not seem to care about it, and kept on cocking his ears in a peculiar way, as if listening for something.

'What can be the matter with Gyp?' said Winnie's mother. 'I never knew him to leave his tea before.'

She had scarcely finished speaking when there was a tremendous bang, which made them all jump.

'An air raid!' exclaimed the mother and grandfather, both at once.

Gyp whined, and, running to Winnie, stood on his hind legs, and put his arms—I mean his fore-paws—round her, as if to protect her. Child and dog clung together, and Gyp licked Winnie's hands. Happily, the tension was over in a few minutes, for nothing more happened. The German aeroplane which had dropped the bomb flew away.

As soon as the little family knew for certain that all was 'clear,' the old man said that he would go out to see what damage had been done. Winnie wanted to go too, but her mother would not allow her to do so. The grandfather went alone, and some one in the street told him that the bomb had fallen on the common.

So off he went to the common, and there, on the very spot where his own allotment had been, gaped a huge crater! Nothing was left of his poor garden; there was only that big hole.

The old man hurried home with his startling news. When Winnie heard it, she flung her arms around Gyp, and kissed him again and again. 'Oh, you darling!' she cried, 'if it had not been for you, my dear grandfather would have been killed by that wicked bomb!'

'Yes, thank God for Gyp!' said her grandfather, as he bent over the pair. 'If he had not made us go home, my dear little Winnie—'

He could say no more. Big tears rolled down his cheeks and fell upon Gyp's back.

When at last Winnie had finished kissing Gyp, her mother began. Between her caresses, she told the dog



"Saying as plainly as possible, 'Do put it on!'"

that never, never would she forget what he had done for her that day: that he deserved the Victoria Cross: that she loved him better than any one else in the world except her husband and her child and

her father—with many other things of the same sort. And now, I am sure, no other dog in the whole kingdom can be more fussed over than is lucky Gyp.

E. DYKE.



THE SOUND OF THE HUNTER'S HORN.

(An Engraving on Wood.)

JEWELS.

MOTHER has a sparkling brooch; she wears it every night; Twinkle, twinkle, twink it goes in the dim firelight. Mother has a bracelet, too, and quite a lot of rings; But she says that jewels are just grown-up people's things. Mother doesn't know, you see, about *my* jewellery— All the lovely ornaments the garden gives to me!

Of the daisies on our lawn I've made the sweetest chain For my neck, and when it droops more daisies grow again. On the cherry-tree, up high, my cherry ear-rings sway; I can have new ear-rings for my ears each single day. And there's dandelion watches just beneath our tree: Aren't they lovely ornaments the garden's given me?

ETHEL TALBOT.

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 271.)

THE next morning Val's ankle was rather painful again, for she had twisted it when she ran down the steps to meet her brother. So it was settled that all plans for departure must be put off for a little while.

Jules left soon after breakfast, for nothing would persuade him to stay longer, and he went off, carrying a large basket of provisions for his journey.

Roger had rather dreaded the parting with his comrade, for it had seemed quite possible that Jules might wish to embrace him; but instead the French boy only held out a sunburnt paw. 'Shake, Roger, mon ami,' he said, with manifest pride in the English word, and then he ceremoniously kissed Val's hand, to her unbounded amazement and delight.

This done, he turned to Suzanne, to whom he had taken a great fancy; for, being a true Frenchman, he had a proper respect for her prowess as a cook, and after kissing her hand too, he gravely stood on tip-toe, and planted a similar salute on her brown wrinkled cheek. 'Farewell, dear madame, till we meet again,' he said, and then, with a final wave of his cap, he trudged away, a sturdy, independent little figure, with Toto following closely at his heels.

Later in the morning a donkey was borrowed from the farm for Val to ride, and she and her brother went together into the town. Roger wanted to see about trains, and to send a telegram to Monkton Ashe, telling his uncle of his safe arrival.

Neither errand was very successful, for the railway service seemed still to be hopelessly upset, as far as civilian passengers were concerned, and the old postmaster shook his head doubtfully over the telegram. Otherwise the expedition was most satisfactory, for Roger was shown the church, the museum, and the castle, and afterwards they had glasses of lemonade at a little open-air café, and bought more cherries than would have seemed possible anywhere else, from an old peasant woman in the market-place.

Everybody seemed to be very cheery and hopeful in St. Denis that morning, for although the war news was vague and meagre, it seemed to be quite satisfactory. The French armies had already gained victories, so it was said, England was going to fight with France, and it was certain that very soon the Germans would be entirely defeated.

Under these happy circumstances, it clearly would be absurd to think of hurrying away from St. Denis, so the children decided that they would stay on until Val's ankle was quite well, and by that time, no doubt, the trains would be running regularly again and everything would be easy and comfortable.

It seems strange now to think of the blinding mist of delusion, conjecture, and rumour that hung over France during those sunny days of early August, when every newspaper contained reports of victories, when disasters were ignored or belittled, losses were slurred over, and when people talked lightly of invincible armies and of a military situation that was eminently satisfactory.

It was possible to live in a fools' paradise then, especially in quiet, out-of-the-way places, where tidings travelled slowly, and the every-day routine went on, to a great extent, as usual.

And all the time, away to the north, beyond that shrouding veil, the great German invasion was sweeping relentlessly on, drawing nearer and nearer, until it was almost possible to see the flames of burning villages flickering through the fog, and to hear the distant thunder of the guns.

To Roger and Val the days passed very quickly, for although they spent most of their time in the big garden or in the woods beyond, there was plenty to do, and old Suzanne devoted her elf heart and soul to the task of making them happy and comfortable.

There seemed to be no reason why they should leave just yet, and certainly Val's ankle was getting stronger every day. In the meantime, trout and other fish could be caught in the little stream that ran through the wood, there was plenty of fruit in the garden, and Roger was busy learning French, with Val as his teacher, and old Suzanne upon whom new words and sentences could be practised.

At last, one afternoon the brother and sister were having a little picnic by themselves in the wood. They had made a fire—Roger's scout lore being invaluable on these occasions—and the kettle had already been boiled and tea made. Now Val was trying hard, but without very much success, to transform two eggs and a sprig of parsley into an omelette, which they had decided would be delicious with sponge-cake and bread-and-jam.

It was a very hot day, for there had, as yet, been hardly a break in the glorious summer weather. It seemed, however, as if a change might be coming now, for all the afternoon there had been the distant, but almost incessant, mutter of thunder.

'They've got a bad storm on somewhere or another,' Roger said once, lifting his head from the bed of heather where he was lying to listen. 'I wonder if we shall get it.'

'Perhaps; but it doesn't feel much like a storm, does it?' Val spoke rather absently, for she was anxious about her cooking, and then the omelette began to burn with a smell that reminded her of the evening, nearly three weeks ago now, when Suzanne's soldier grandson had come to say good-bye.

She stirred the mixture in the little pan vigorously, until, to her surprise, it began to show signs of a complete transformation. 'Hullo! it's going to be scrambled eggs,' she announced. 'Really I'm getting to be quite a good cook, Roger. What fun it would be to camp out and get all our own food. If we had a rabbit I'm certain I could make a perfectly heavenly stew.'

'I'd shoot any number of rabbits for you, if I had a

gun,' said Roger, lazily; 'or that pistol that Sam wanted to buy. You can't very well kill rabbits with a bowie-knife.'

'That's always the worst of it; having to kill the rabbits, I mean.' Val gazed dreamily away into the green distance. 'What a pity it is that you can't cook things without having to kill them first. Roger!' her voice changed suddenly, 'I do believe there's a rabbit now, in the bracken, just behind you.'

Roger started up and looked in the direction of the girl's pointing finger. Something certainly was pushing its way through the dense thicket of fern and bramble. There was a loud rustling sound, and the graceful fronds waved to and fro like the wind-swept branches of a miniature forest. 'Yes, it must be a rabbit—or a fox.'

The boy sprang to his feet, and then from among the bracken emerged a little white animal, but it was not a rabbit after all. It was a dog, and, moreover, a dog that they knew: Toto himself.

'Toto!' Both Roger and Val opened their eyes wide in amazement; and then Val, stooping, picked the little creature up in her arms and kissed his rough head. They were delighted to see Toto again, for, if he were here, his master could not be very far away.

'Jules, Jules, Jules!' Roger called his friend's name at the top of his voice, but there was no answer, and the next moment Toto struggled out of Val's arms and disappeared once more into the tangled undergrowth. The boy and girl pushed through it after him, and then they all went on across an open space, where the ground was brown and slippery with pine-needles, round a huge holly-bush, and down a narrow, winding path.

They found Jules at last, such a pale, weary-looking little Jules, lying among the mossy roots of an oak-tree. His shoes were worn into holes, his clothes were torn and dirty, his head was bare, and there was a blood-stained bandage tied round one hand and wrist.

The boy's eyes were shut, and at first Roger and Val thought that he was asleep, but after a moment his eyelids lifted and he greeted the new-comers with a shadow of his old beaming smile.

'Ullo, Roger,' he said; and then his expression altered, as if he had suddenly remembered something, and he caught Val's arm, gripping it tightly in his uninjured left hand. 'Why are you here still?' he asked. 'I thought you had gone away, long ago, to England. But you must go now, now at once, before they come.'

'Before they come—who? What do you mean?' But Jules did not answer the girl's questions. He had slipped back again, and shut his eyes as if utterly exhausted. 'I'm hungry,' he whispered; 'so hungry. Please give me something to eat.'

'What's up? Poor old Jules looks as if he'd been in the wars, doesn't he?' said Roger.

Val nodded gravely. 'He's hungry—starving, I think,' she said. 'Come, Roger, help me lift him up. He doesn't look as if he would be able to walk by himself.'

The two children raised Jules to his feet, and between them they managed to carry him to their little encampment. He had revived again by that time, and after a hot cup of tea, which he drank with a grimace, as if it had been medicine, and several large slices of bread-and-jam, he seemed almost himself again.

Then he told his story, Val translating it sentence by sentence into English for her brother's benefit.

Jules, it appeared, had not been able after all to reach the fortress which had been his goal when he left St. Denis, but he had not allowed this failure to daunt him or to change his determination to get to the Front. 'As they wouldn't let me go east, I went north,' he said. 'All the soldiers were going that way.' And he had actually managed to attach himself to a regiment, and had travelled up the valley of the Meuse and across the Belgian frontier.

The little French boy, it was evident, was one of those people who always manage to get what they want, somehow, and he told of how the Belgian peasants had welcomed the soldiers, and how he had stayed for more than a week in a farm where some of his new friends were billeted.

Then the regiment had gone on without him, although he had begged to be taken too; and there had been a great battle. The Germans had captured some place—he was not sure of its name; then the French had won a victory, but afterwards the Germans had come back again.

At this point Jules' narrative began to be disjointed and incoherent, but it was evident that one disaster had followed another, and that the invaders had come on and on, the French retreating before them, and fighting valiantly as they went back.

At last they had come very near, the Germans, and the village, even the farmhouse itself where Jules was staying, had been under the fire of their artillery.

Every one rushed away then to take refuge in France, leaving their homes deserted, and Jules had been carried southward in the great exodus.

The little boy stopped, and Val translated the last sentences, Roger listening with a pale, awed face.

'And your hand, Jules—what's the matter with your hand?' Val demanded. 'Have you hurt it badly?'

And then Jules' wide, merry smile broke out again. 'It's not a hurt, mademoiselle—it's a wound,' he said proudly. 'There was a splinter of a shell. They fired at the farm, those Germans, but I was the only one to be wounded.'

Little Jules had, indeed, been in the wars.

'I came back to France with the Belgians,' the boy went on. 'There are thousands of them, the roads are blocked with their carts; but this morning, very early, I came on here by myself. "Madame Suzanne will be alone," that is what I said, "and will need some one to protect her." So I came; but it was a long way, and I had nothing to eat. I thought you would have gone, Mademoiselle—you and Roger. But you must go now, quickly, before the Germans come.'

'The Germans?' Roger echoed the word as his sister translated it with a puzzled frown. 'But I thought—we heard—do you think it can be true, Val? They must be a long way from here—in Belgium. Ask him, Val, is he quite sure.'

Val repeated her brother's question, and for a moment Jules did not answer. He had raised his head, and was listening intently. Roger and Val listened too.

It was very quiet and peaceful there in the forest, and the wind had dropped completely. The constant mutter of thunder away beyond the hills to the north could still be heard.

'Hark!' Jules said, holding up his bandaged hand as if to enjoin silence. 'The sound of guns!'

(Continued on page 286.)



"It was a dog, and, moreover, a dog that they knew."