

## Fragments of an Interrupted Courtship.

BY ANNIE T. ROTTER.



HE ragged pines of old Virginia had hardly settled themselves firmly in the soil of the Confederacy to which the secession of the old foggy State had transplanted them, when, in the shadows of an antiquated library, a young apostle of the new doctrine wrote:—

CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA,  
RICHMOND, VA., April 20, 1861.

DR. SCHUYLER VANSITTART.

*My Dear Sir:* You will observe that (without, believe me, a tremor or the straining of a single heart tendon) I have changed my nationality and my country. Instead of the "stars and stripes," the "stars and bars" float to the breeze (excuse extreme originality of expression), and our brand new ship of State dares, alone, the storms of war. You and I may never meet again—nothing would induce me to marry a horrid Yankee,—so try to forget me, as the very remembrance of you is ignored. With three cheers for Dixie,

Yours in oblivion,

ELIZABETH PONSONBY.

The rosewood cabinet desk of old-fashioned make sustained, without doubt, a terrific shock at being made the innocent accessory to so dynamitical an epistle; in its long life nothing so shocking had ever been penned upon the placid surface of its patient writing shelf. The prim little notes of its long-buried former owners had never overstepped the lightest bounds of severe decorum. No pen had ever before shaken in belligerent dips the trembling ink-stand that stood open mouthed, aghast, at such indecorous words. The poor old dignified penholder, carved from one of Washington's walking sticks, made no effort to understand the new-fangled lines that its nib so viciously scratched over the paper. "Southern Confederacy," indeed! It had never heard of such a thing from the quaint, low-voiced belles who had so laboriously spelled out their stiff little letters to the originals

of the faded pictures, whose faces looked rigid enough, certainly, to put out of countenance a loaded bombshell.

"There," exclaimed the young lady, whose energetic pressure of the seal shook the ancient rheumatic legs of the entire epistolary establishment, "that settles *that!*"

"Oh, no," creaked and rattled the rusty lock, "your grandmother's eyes didn't flash like that; dear me, no, nor your great-aunt's either; not even when the major marched off to Lake Erie (that's his picture over the fireplace), even though, poor man, he never marched back again. Hoity, hoity, what are we coming to in these dismal new times?"

Quite in the spirit of a cavalry charge, to overwhelm the enemy in a first attack, was dashed off this communication — so startling to the old desk — with its astounding title headings, intensely savage sentiments, and ninety degree Fahrenheit patriotism. Back came the answer to the young protestant, whose only cause for affront lay in the unfortunate geographical position of her correspondent's home: "Love knows neither creed nor country, and, although a less conspicuous title would have been more to my taste, yet — we shall meet again."

War opened, hostile armies confronted each other between Richmond and the Potomac; Mason and Dixon's line was accentuated by fixed bayonets and enforced by the booming of cannon; sword thrusts gave point to geographical boundaries, while the long roll of the drum warned off all intruders.

Letters flew North from the blue uniforms on the Potomac, and travelled South from the gray coats at Manassas, but never crossed, save by flag of truce, the sharp wall made by picketed muskets. Terrible orders from irascible old generals, who had outgrown romance and outlived sentiment, sternly directed all letters to be read before passing under the white folds of these same peaceful banners. So every word was weighed, and dictionaries became the popular literature of the day to those that wrote to "the other side," in order that a phrase might be found capable of expressing everything to some particular person, but betraying nothing to the flag-of-truce-letter-reading department. No one must suspect that the loving inquiries about Aunt Jane's neuralgia, or the intense anxiety concerning Uncle John's rheumatism meant an

altogether different query to those that wrote so guardedly. So personals in the leading newspapers, North and South, were resorted to, and many a line held a bleeding heart, while a single word often carried joy to an entire household, or that most awful of all personals, initials and a date, followed by the one word "killed," embodied too frequently the history of a broken life. But no such tragio announcements were for Elizabeth. A calm, dignified, eminently proper personal in the H —

SCHUYLER hopes little sister's fever is abating. Grandpa sends love. Richmond E— please copy.

was all. Back by rapid transit traveled the answer (he could almost see the nervous fingers fly over the paper):—

ELIZABETH no better. Grandma never liked blue. H— please copy.

One dismal morning Mrs. Ponsonby was sewing diligently on a soldier's haversack, one of an immense pile, in such haste to finish her task that she wasted no time in fastening stitches or in strengthening straps. Thus, without the eye of a prophet, one might see, in future weary marches, many a poor fellow's scanty rations slipping through the gaps in this same haversack made by fingers more enthusiastic in effort than proficient in accomplishment, and hear, instead of the blessings the old lady expected to be poured on her industrious hands and self-sacrificing heart, the echo of an assortment of ejaculations, made possible only by Confederate whiskey, flung at the careless fingers of the maker.

"Mighty po'-lookin' sojer want to see you, Mis' Clementine," said efficient though ungrammatical Judy, nodding her turbanned head to Mrs. Ponsonby through a diminutive opening in the door. "Say he ain' hornrgry, 'cause I dun as' him dat fus' thing; look monsus poly, do' fus' sojer I see in a mont' o' moons whar ain' hornrgry."

"On the nineteenth of May," said the limping wearer of a ragged gray coat, as he stood in Mrs. Ponsonby's presence, with the crown of a hat surrounded by a broken halo of brim in his hand, "our regiment held a position on the right of the 10th Alabama, the attacking force. Behind an old house, set at just the

right angle, as it seemed to us, to hide an ambuscade, a party of sharpshooters was carefully and all too accurately picking off our men. Suddenly an aim was unerringly taken — our flag trembled and fell — ”

And so it went on, the familiar but ever moving tale of a flag-bearer killed, a soldier — the narrator of the story — springing to the rescue of his standard, himself to be laid senseless by a bullet. From this oblivion he had been wakened from a drenching cold waterbath to hear the verdict, “ Poor fellow ; leg badly shattered ! ” pronounced over him by a voice with a slight nasal twang. A voice, it chanced, that he was destined to hear daily during his tedious illness, for the man who had picked him up on the field was also the assistant in the hospital, and quite a friendship grew up between the young doctor and his patient, through their many conversations. So it was that on the day of the narrator’s discharge, the surgeon, along with congratulations on the other’s recovery and approaching exchange, gave a confidence and asked a favor, as he said, “ while your ardor is yet at white heat.

“ Three years ago,” the doctor continued, “ before this hateful war was ever dreamed of, and while I was a student in Philadelphia, I became acquainted with a young lady from Richmond. The circumstances were romantic — well, never mind them — it’s a long story — Tell you some other time, perhaps,” he added dubiously, “ five years after a treaty of peace, as the Confederate bills say.

“ Well, without going through the various stages of the affair, from rapture to despair, and from despair back, through faint glimmerings of hope, to ecstasy again, the decision was finally reached that we were, well, after a fashion, engaged ; quite, I assure you, on the order of poor Harry and the well-nigh forgotten Flora of Madison Square fame. Just then, with abominable inopportuneness, I felt, Mr. Lincoln asked Virginia (mind you, when the day was, after many delays, actually fixed) for her quota of troops. Poor old Virginia had, with her usual deliberateness, been slow to move, but this call moved her — out of the Union — leaving me, as Miss Elizabeth thought, on the wrong side.

“ One day, it must have been by the last through mail, I received a most astounding letter from the young lady herself ;

terrific headings, shocking sentiments, 'Southern Confederacy,' and all the rest of it. Quite a doubling up of fists all 'round, a regular 'one-Southerner-can-whip-five-Yankees' epistle. *She* said 'ending everything.' *I* said 'Never,' with a capital N. Well, to come to the pith of the affair, we hear through personals of each other,—awfully cut and dried way of writing love letters though, you know; so I ask you, as man to man, to get a letter to Elizabeth from me. Of course you can't carry a written communication. I don't care to treat the camp to a specimen of my ability as a military Romeo, so I am going to read you the epistle which you, once safe in Richmond after your exchange, are to write out in my name and hand to her in person. Now will you do this, without altering jot or tittle, except to throw into it all the fervor you can convey on paper; and will you remember that under no circumstances are you to give this precious document into any hands save those of the terrible little rebel who wrote the wonderful letter of 1861; or, if impossible to see her, then into those of her mother?"

To that question the letter now passed from the hands of the "raggedy man" to the feminine fingers that dropped the unfinished haversack to receive it, was the silent and sufficient answer.

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The smoke still lingered over the smoldering chimneys of Richmond when Judy, ignorant of the interstate episode in her mistress's love affairs, entered one morning to announce a visitor.

"Gemman in de parlor, Mis' 'Lizbeth, an' clar to goodness, you'll hev' to 'scuse me, but he mos' sholy do look powerful like one o' dem Yankees whar cum in wid de Union."

And after the end at Appomattox, when the guns were stacked for all time by the tired hands of the starved men who wept as they laid them aside, Surgeon Vansittart and Elizabeth — But what need to go over the old story? Patriotic fervor gave place to cosmopolitan love — was it ever otherwise? Cupid is blind, so gray and blue are alike to him. And ought we not to dwell together in "love and peace"?