

The Albany Register.

ALBANY, OREGON, MARCH 12, 1880.

NO. 24

VOLUME XII.

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v11n23

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Albany, October 22, 1875-78

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The Ribbon of Honor.

The night was very cold, and we had drawn up around the fire—an open fire of sea coal, which the size of the room rendered necessary, even when the furnace was, according to Patrick, "at the top of its hat." We were a small party—my cousin and my cousin's wife, her sister, Patty Emerson—a dark-eyed, Castilian-looking girl, whom you were constantly naming, in your imagination, Senora Inez, or Dolores; anything but the commonplace "Patty," to which she really responded—and Major Howitt, an English friend of my cousin's and a charming person, easy, jovial and sympathetic, and with a background of personal history which dated from the Crimea.

With myself we made just five, a group unequal as to whisk, but quite equal to a much livelier pastime—story telling. The Major, good fellow, had "opened the ball" with a "thrilling tale" or two from his Crimean experiences, and then for the first time we discovered that he was one of those heroes who had won the Victoria cross. Patty's eyes glistened.

"Oh, to think," she cried out, "that we here in America have gone through such a war, have had such splendid heroes, and not a national badge or a ribbon of honor to crown and specialize our special heroes!"

My cousin—who was himself something of a hero in the war, and whom I all called the Colonel when we did not more affectionally and irreverently style him "Cousin Jim"—at this point gave utterance to an exclamation which at once aroused our interest.

"What is it, Colonel? There's a bee buzzing in your bonnet, that's certain; and, as I've told all my stories for to-night, you might as well open up your budget," put in Major Howitt. We all joined in this invitation or suggestion, and, after a minute or two, my cousin's pleasant voice was telling the story of the evening—the story of "The Ribbon of Honor."

"You remember Melroe?" he began, glancing at us three ladies. "He was the brightest, gayest little fellow, this Melroe," addressing himself to Major Howitt, "the life of my regiment, and he won his captaincy, though he was but twenty-three years old. The night before his last battle, I recollect, was a specially merry evening all round, owing to Melroe's wit and humorous drollery. Dalzell of the Fifteenth and Melroe had a tent together, and Hoyle and the two brothers, Arthy and Cam Browne, together with myself, were invited in that night to a little supper of Mel's giving. I recollect perfectly, as I went in, seeing Melroe bending over the oysters which he was cooking upon a spirit lamp. He was great at all those things, and Cam Browne was running him as only Cam Browne could. 'You've missed your vocation, Mel; you should have been apprenticed to Soyer,' Cam was saying. 'You always had a knack at that kind of messing; and I remember,' turning to the rest of us, 'when he came a little urchin to school, and he actually, at that tender age, had furnished himself with sundry tin cups and various conveniences for brewing messes, and he was forever at it.' As I heard this I recalled the first time I met the youngster myself. I was at the same school, one of the seniors, and he was a little chap not yet turned into his teens, very fond of play, very fond of his tin cup business, and very much afraid of ghosts. I used to meet him running down the corridors after dark. And once I remember very well when we were all in our rooms and the lights were being put out, how a little white face looked in and a little shabby voice cried, 'King, will you lend me your toothache drops?' I questioned the boy; 'Got the tooth-ache, Mel?' 'No, he answered, 'but Morty has.' 'So you braved the ghosts for Morty's toothache,' I retorted, viciously; 'and what's more, to my thinking, the cold.' I told him I didn't think I should crawl out of my warm bed on such an errand; that Jack Frost, the very whitest ghost I ever saw, was waiting for him in that entry. The little chap flared up like a rocket. 'Do you think I'd let a chap have a toothache for all the ghosts in the world?' he cried out, passionately, winding up with, 'Oh, I hate you big boys; you are all so selfish!' I tried to mollify him by offering to fight him back, but he snatched the drops and banged the door in my face; and I heard him running down the corridor,

gasping every inch of the way for fear of the ghosts, and all for Morty Richmond's (his room-mate's) toothache; and I know of this little man's lying awake for hours one night with his own toothache, which he bore rather than brave the dark corridor! I told this story, just as I am telling it now, to the fellows that night in the tent, as we all stood and watched Melroe at his oysters. I had a special reason for telling it. I knew very well that not a man in all the regiment was so little understood as Holland Melroe—perhaps so little appreciated. His estimate there that night, with those who liked him heartily, too, was of a gay, good-humored fellow, who took his soldier's life as easily as was consistent with a good deal of laziness and a little shrinking from any active service. I felt sure that I read him better than this, and that beneath this exterior of laziness and shrinking there lay noble qualities of courage and valor. As I finished my story that night Dalzell called out, 'You ought to have had a medal for overcoming your dragon, Mel.' 'Or a cordon bleu,' Cam Browne suggested. From that they all fell to talking of the foreign system of badges and medals of honor, and one of the young men pulled out of his pocket, I recollect, a *Cornhill Magazine*, and read to us Thackeray's *Roundabout paper* 'On Ribbons.' The final summing up of the talk was in great agreement with Thackeray, and the general conclusion that we ought to have a 'ribbon of honor,' not simply a Kearney cross, but a grand cordon bleu or a medal coming straight from the heart and hand of that grand old fellow, Abraham Lincoln, Dalzell burst out. 'Of course we're all too modest to ever expect to be decked in that way, but how many of us would disdain it?'

"As the talk deepened, Melroe's face had lost its gayety, I noticed. He drew a deep sigh as Dalzell spoke, and a wistful look came into his eyes. I could guess pretty well how it was with him. What was he beside them? What brilliant, or courageous, or soldierly, or spirited qualities had he? These men would easily win their cordon bleus, for they were without fear. Without fear! That was what was in his mind, as he very shortly confessed by a blundering, honest question; bearing directly upon the subject. How did it feel to be without fear? Every man of them knew of this little white ghost of Melroe's, yet every one of them knew that he never had failed to do his duty. They had laughed quietly together over it and said, 'Mel is a good fellow; he will never run away, but he never will distinguish himself—that is certain.' And now suddenly with this question arose another with them: How came he here into this voluntary service with this characteristic? But before asking it they answered his query one and another smiling, yet serious and truthful.

"At their first battle? Yes, it had been a shock, and then it was over. Various emotions assailed them now, but none of fear. But how was it with him, they asked. They all knew something how it was, as I have said but not wholly, until he burst out impulsively:

"Well, to tell the truth, boys, I will own that I am awfully afraid every time, to this day, and I can't help it."

"But how came you here, anyway, with that feeling; and being here, why do you stay?" asked Cam Browne.

"For a moment there was a look of surprise on Melroe's face, a look as if he doubted whether he had heard aright.

"How came I?" he uttered, slowly; 'how would I stay at home? A man can't choose at such a time. If I saw an assassin enter my friend's house while he lay sleeping, I might be very much afraid of the assassin, but I couldn't very well go on my way in safety and tell some other man to go forward to the rescue. I might recoil ten times more from the skulking away from it. No, he went on, 'I thought this all over; I knew it would hurt—this kind of life—but I concluded it would hurt a great deal more to turn my back upon it. Why, believing as I do, you know, a fellow couldn't! I can see Hoyle and Dalzell and the two Brownes exchange glances here. They two, eye, and every one of them there, I know, thought of the story of the boy at school even then manfully fighting his ghosts for his principle. Those of us who had smiled at his ghost and said, 'Mel is a

good fellow; he never will run away, but he never will distinguish himself, that is certain, now, in contemplation of this courageous cowardice, felt inclined to doff our hats to the simple, manly fellow we had underrated and to ask his pardon. But there was little said in acknowledgment or praise; it was a tender subject, involving this foregone lighter estimate; but there were wistful and friendly glances in the 'Good nights' which conveyed to him a sense of sympathy, an assurance to his modest mind that he had not spoken too freely, I remember Cam Browne, said, laughingly, as he left the tent, 'After all, Captain, you may win your cordon bleu before any of us yet.'

"They were light words spoken hastily, out of the warm, kind heart of the young officer, as a good natured remark to evince his belief in that moral courage which should make them no longer light words in the memory of us who listened to them.

"The next day we fought the battle of Chancellorsville. Toward the latter part of the day, when defeat was beginning to stalk us in the face, after the earlier promise of victory, which combined and splendid action and the most untiring gallantry had given, I received a message from Major Dalzell to send a reinforcement to the left wing, where Captain Melro and himself were endeavoring to hold their ground and save their colors. I had only a handful of men that I could ill spare, but I sent them immediately, for I knew that Dalzell would not have applied for help unless he had great need. Immediate action being suspended for a time on my right, I had a brief opportunity to observe the movements of the left. As I looked through my glass, I saw Dalzell advance with his column, not a large body of men, but compact and in order. A heavy roar of musketry met them; still they kept on, though I could see that the raking fire had told. The next charge was more fatal. As the smoke cleared the lamented effect was obvious. More than one gallant fellow had fallen; among them was their leader, Dalzell. The column began to waver. The consequence of this particular point of a panic and a rout would be especially disastrous. I rose in my saddle in my excitement: 'Ah, I thought, 'if I could only dash forward to the rescue!'

"At that moment I saw that a new leader had arisen. I saw him rush forward; I saw him glance back to the broken, wavering ranks; I saw him beckon them on with his sword, and, more than all, by a look of command that impressed me even then. At sight of him the wavering ranks closed in, and dashed forward with a shout that reached me where I watched, and which I knew meant victory or death. A few moments later the Sixteenth came up to reinforce the right wing, and I had the liberty to ride forward. Melroe—for you have guessed that he was the leader who took Dalzell's place—Melroe, by his magnetic leadership, his dash and spirit, had saved his colors and won; for his men at least, a famous victory, one of those side issues of success which go far to ameliorate the greater defeat.

"But it was a victory I didn't feel much like rejoicing in, as I saw Melroe himself lying on a little hillock, shot through the heart. The Color-sergeant—a little Irish fellow—had dragged him to the upland where he lay, and as I approached he took off his cap, more in honor to the dead than to me, and said chokingly:

"See that, Colonel; he seized 'em out of my hand as I was tuk dizzy-like with this scratch on my forehead, and when I came to myself he had got his death—saving of me and the flag sir."

"The little Sergeant had laid the colors upon the breast of his dead officer as tenderly as a mother might strew flowers upon her child. Cam Browne just then joining me, I pointed out to him the sad spectacle. Cam bent over and touched the tattered remnants that meant so much and had cost so much. 'He has won his cordon bleu!' he said, significantly. Yes, he had won his cordon bleu, the brave little fellow; fighting a double enemy every inch of the way." The Colonel passed his moment and took out an old memorandum book. Opening it, he drew forth something that seemed of many colors, a strip either of paper or silk, only a few inches in length and breadth. "This," he resumed, "is a piece of that cordon bleu. It was wet with his blood when I took it, and I have kept it ever since,

for I knew no one else who was nearer to Melroe than myself, for he was an orphan, and without brothers or sisters. If he had had a sweetheart, I would have sent it to her, that she might have known what a hero she had lost in this young fellow, whose delicate, sensitive nature shrank from the conflicts which his great soul urged him into. I have seen many brave charges, many forlorn hopes carried since that day, Howitt; but I never saw a braver charge, or a more forlorn hope carried than this that led Melroe to his death. We throured Dalzell, good fellow, but there was something in the loss of Melroe that went beyond every other loss. We loved him better than we knew, and when we buried him there every one of us recalled that sentence of his, 'I might recoil from the encounter, but I should recoil ten times more from the skulking away from it.'

A momentary silence fell upon us all as the Colonel ceased. But as he closed his memorandum book, shutting in the strip of blood-stained, faded silk, a voice broke the silence:

"James, give it to me—Holland Melroe's cordon bleu!"

"You, Patty?"

"Yes, to me, James," Patty answered, quite steadily, though white as the dead.

Mechanically, perhaps instinctively, the Colonel held out the sacred memento without a word. But the Colonel's wife had no such delicate instinct of the truth.

"What do you mean, Patty?" she exclaimed.

"I mean," returned Patty, with great dignity, "that I have a better right to Holland Melroe's cordon bleu than any one else."

"Oh, Patty, and all that time you were—" But Mrs. King's discretion came back to her; it was too late, however, to serve her purpose.

"Yes, Emily; all the time I was engaged to Morton Eames. But you know who brought me into that. It was scarcely my own, and Holland Melroe never sought me after he discovered this. I knew his heart and mine. When I got news of his death I broke my engagement to Morton, but I could not go talking about Holland then. I had no right to tell the truth then, who could not tell it before—who had to be told by death what the whole truth meant even to myself."

By this time we had all been brought up, as it were, to Patty's revelation—all but Mrs. King. I noticed vaguely that she looked disturbed, and glanced uneasily at Major Howitt. But for that I should have forgotten his presence, yet even then he did not seem an intruder, stranger though he was.

The Colonel, always fond of his little sister Patty, as he called her, found new cause for tenderness now. She had been Melroe's sweetheart—Melroe, whom he had loved! And, leaning forward, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

The next morning I got the meaning of Mrs. King's disturbance. She came into my room with the words:

"Just think of Patty's making such a mess of it."

"What do you mean?" I inquired, thoroughly amazed.

"Oh, dear! what do I mean? Don't you see that Major Howitt was immensely pleased with Patty? And now, just for that old sentimental nonsense being dragged up, it will fall through, for he is not the man to play second fiddle to any other man, dead or alive. And it would have been such a match for Patty! I wound up this fascinating but worldly Mrs. King.

"I can keep a secret, when I like, as well as Patty, and I'll keep this; and I'm glad your sentiment has turned out better than my sense this time, sir," she retorted, gayly.

Her husband laughed too, but he looked at her, I thought, a little sadly, as he replied:

"Ah, Em! perhaps you'll see some time that our sentiment, as you call it, is better than your sense."

But she never will!

Seven years ago this conversation took place, seven years ago this very day! And this morning I went down to the St. Denis to call upon Mrs. Felix Lundy Howitt, who had just arrived from England on a three months visit. Before I left her a sweet-faced English girl came bringing in a sweet-faced half-English and half-American baby of two years, though he looked for all the world as much like a young Castilian as his dark-eyed mother.

"And what is his name?" I asked.

"Holland—Holland Melroe Howitt," Felix named him, and he would have it so. Wasn't it superb of him? But Felix is superb—you never saw such a man, dear, as Felix."

I told my cousin, the Colonel, of this conversation. He looked at his wife, that pretty, light-natured, fascinating little Emily.

"Here's our sentiment against your sense, Mrs. Emily. You see how well it works?"

"Yes, I see," she answered, "but—laughing in our faces—" "I was right in one thing. I told you the Major wasn't the man to play second fiddle, and he isn't. He signs that part to his son, you see!"

—NORAH PURRY, in Appleton's Journal.

A short time since, when one of the elevated railway trains stopped at the Ninth street station, an elderly woman, plainly dressed and looking like one of the working class, entered with the crowd.

The seats seemed to be all occupied, but one, which she did not see, was vacant. An old gentleman reading a newspaper glanced up and saw her standing near the door. He then looked along the car and saw the vacant seat. Leaving his own seat he advanced to the plainly dressed woman, raised his hat, motioned to the vacant seat, escorted her half way to it, bowed courteously and returned to his own place and resumed his reading without seeming to think that he had done any thing that any one should notice. It was noticed, however, and a lawyer who was in the car, and who recognized Charles O'Connor, said to a friend beside him: "That's O'Connor, every time. He would rather do that for a plain, poor woman than for the finest lady in New York. He has his oddities, but there isn't a more thorough gentleman living."

While Chief Justice Cray of the Massachusetts Supreme Court was enjoying his favorite exercise of horseback-riding on a highway bordering on Jamaica Plain Pond, near Boston, on Sunday, a crack in the ice produced a loud report which startled his horse, causing it to jump suddenly aside. The Chief Justice was thrown to the ground, receiving a fracture of the right arm near the elbow.

An office-holder at Washington once wrote to Texas that he was having a grand time, and was really "a bigger man than old Grant." The letter fell into malicious hands, was given publicly, and sealed his political doom. General Russ of Indiana was lately so imprudent as to write a similar epistle. Having been summoned to Washington as a witness in case somewhat partisan in character, he wrote to a friend a glowing description of the insinuations of the great Republic's capital, and added: "I'll be home in ten days or two, but before I come back I will arrange it so that you can get summoned as a witness. Then you can have your fun." The letter was promptly printed, and General Russ is on the retired list.

The Judges of the Supreme Court of Iowa are being pestered with a very disagreeable accusation. They have been charging the State mileage for their regular official tours, and it is now asserted that every one of them rides on a free railroad pass. It is bad enough for a member of the Legislature to be guilty of a trick of the kind, but how can a Supreme Court Judge descend to such a practice and keep his name unspotted?

The British postal system is considerably in advance of ours. Its latest novelty is to be the issue of postal notes of small denominations, which can be purchased by the traveling and sent through the mails with all the safety of a postage order. The convenience will be in obviating the necessity of purchasing an order every time a small sum requires to be mailed. The American system might be materially improved.

An epidemic in India is not an affair just important enough to warrant the liberal issue of some Board of Health. Neither is it just severe enough to make doctors look cheerful and wise. It creates a vacancy in human ranks. By one fever that spread through the northwestern provinces of that country, a few months ago, 400,000 people perished. Nevertheless there is and overtops of population there.

The Northern Pacific logging camps, situated on the banks of the Yakima river, at the foot of the Cascade range, employ about one hundred and twenty-five men. There will be 100,000,000 feet of logs for the ice, bridge, lumber and culverts floated down to Yakima river from the Kittitas county this summer and fall.