ONE YEAR AGO.

One year ago we sat where tall trees made
Above our heads a sympathetic shade;
The world was all in bloom; the very air
Pulsed with the summer, round us everywhere.

We saw the blue sky through the green arcade:
The birds and breezes sung our serenade;
That happy day, the day beyond compare,
One year ago.

We saw each other's souls; with joy afraid,
We turned away to do as duty bade;
O love! the sweet, sad knowledge that we share
Has made all days since then more dear and fair,
Though silence on our lips her finger laid,
One year ago.
—Carlotta Perry in Brooklyn Magazine.

"HOUP-LA."

CHAPTER I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No."

"Where is his father?"

"He's dead."

"And his mother?"

"She's dead too!"

"Ah!—and who looks after him?"

"I do" (very unwillingly).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"'Ere he is to speak for 'isself. I'll ask 'im," laughed a third, who chanced to be too big to stand in any awe of the ringmaster. "'Ello, Frisco," he remarked lightly, "'as the swell from the barracks been a-leathering of yer?"

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

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

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

CHAPTER II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And who is Mrs. Wilson?"

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

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

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

"And how long has she been dead?"

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

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

"Twelve. Going on thirteen, sir."

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

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

"Or write?"

The head was shaken again. "No; but I can do the snake trick and the wriggling dodge—t' ev're both werry difficult," eagerly.

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

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

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

"At it again?" asked another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bootles laughed outright.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, sir, I do."

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

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

"I'll never do nothink wot'll vex you," he cried, sobbing wildly. "I never will—not never—no, not if I was to swing for it."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

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

"I'll take young Houp-La," he said suddenly to Mrs. Bootles, after he had gone over in his mind all the likely men he knew. "He knows how to do for me just as well as Terry does. I'll take him."

And so young Tom was rigged out in haste, and followed his master's fortunes into the land of the Pharaohs.

Bootles' choice proved to be a very wise selection. The voyage out was the most miserable time he had ever passed; true, he had at one period been more unhappy, but never had he known before what it was to really miss a daily presence out of his life, not one, but two—his wife and Mignon.

In every respect young Tom suited him; he knew just what he wanted, and just when he wanted it; he was great at holding his tongue, and never bothering his master with questions about this or that, as a strange servant must necessarily have done. He was intensely sympathetic to the sleepless pain in Capt. Ferrers' eyes; and, after all, what sympathy is there which is so sweet as the sympathy of those who themselves have known the extremes of pain and misery? Young Tom, too, was sympathetic in silence.

Then, moreover, apart from his services to his master, he proved quite a host in himself by way of relieving the tedium and weariness which the voyage was to the man, to whom every hour seemed the length of a day, every mile as long as a dozen. It is always hard to keep men amused and content on board ship, particularly on board a troop ship, where, with all ranks, life is a continuous fight for daily bread, to say nothing of comfort, from port to port.

It is a tedious and irksome enough time to the officers, who have the best accommodation which the ship affords; but for those who live between decks, with but few papers and amusements and but a limited amount of beer and tobacco, matters are still worse; and it is not easy to find words to convey anything like an adequate idea of what that life's weariness and *ennui* really is.

It was here that young Tom, from being only a sharp-tongued general favorite, suddenly grew, like Capt. Garnet's head, as Lacy remarked one night when they were steaming past the African coast, into "a gwreat and—er—shining light." With his master's permission and some help from the sailors, he got the tailor to make him up a set of clown's garments, and furbished up all his old circus tricks with such right good will that more than once he had the honor of appearing before the most distinguished officers on board the Clyde. He pleased them each and all so greatly that when he took his white hat round for contributions to the fund for the wives and children who had been left behind, he obtained so good a sum that Bootles, whose heart was tender to every man who could in any way approach or share his feelings on that subject, made it up to the even and respectable amount of £5 out of his own pocket.

And then at last they steamed into the harbor of Alexandria, and the voyage was over. For some of them it was very near indeed to the close of the voyage of life. But they never seemed to think of it, action was the order of the day, and dispiritedness and down-heartedness apparently had flown from their midst. All was energy and bustle—tall lancers clanker along the half ruined eastern-looking streets, tramped in and out of the bazaars and cafes, laughing in good-natured British contempt at nearly everything they saw, grumbled in true British style at all discomforts, sworn roundly at the flies and the dust, hob-nobbed with sunburned tars from the ships of war in the harbor, and scattered everywhere the energetic signs of British rule and occupation.

"I say, Bill," said one strapping, broad-shouldered red jacket to one of a group of his comrades one night, "wasn't the chaplain preaching about the seven plagues of Egypt the Sunday afore we left 'ome?"

"Ay!" responded Bill, sending a great cloud of smoke into the midst of a cloud of flies.

"Do you remember what they was?"

"Why," answered Bill, hesitatingly, "there was frogs, flies and lice—and darkness, and blood—that's four. And hail, and blains—I suppose they're boils, or wuss—and the loss of the firstborn."

"By gum!" ejaculated the first, "but old Pharaoh must have 'ad some grit in him to stand all that. I wonder if they had any baccy in them days," and then he, too, took a mighty draw at his big pipe, and let the flies in his immediate neighborhood have the full benefit thereof, after which he spat contemptuously into the midst of the swarm by way of distinctly adding insult to injury.

The flies did not particularly seem to appreciate the attention, and they forthwith settled down upon Private John Wood, No. 741, as if they had a special mission from Arabi Pasha to determine the exact value of "grit," as "grit" goes, in the ranks of the British army.

"Blowed if ever I knew the like o' this," quoth Private John Wood, No. 741. "Why, old Pharaoh must have 'ad a hide like Beezlebub."

CHAPTER IV.

Private John Wood, No. 741, was not the only man in the Scarlet Lancers whose "grit" the flies took an opportunity of valuing. They settled down upon Lacy as if he were a sweet and toothsome morsel such as did not often come in their way, which probably was exactly the true state of the case.

But Bootles they left strangely alone—perhaps he took after Pharaoh of old. Any way, certain it is that he suffered less from the climate and its attendant plagues than any other officer in the regiment, and it was partly owing to this—at least it was entirely due to his habitually cool and self-possessed demeanor, which he could not have maintained had the flies pestered him as they did some of the others, Lacy, for instance—that one evening, a few days after they had left Alexandria and Ramleh behind them, when he was lying half asleep in his hammock, a thump-thump sounded upon the wooden box which stood just outside the entrance to his tent.

"Yes—what is it?" he called out sleepily; then, as an orderly appeared in the doorway, asked, "Well, orderly; what is it?"

"The colonel's compliments, sir, and he wishes to see you as soon as possible."

"Very well. Tell the colonel, with my compliments, that I'll be with him immediately," he answered, and the orderly, saluting, disappeared.

With all haste he rolled out of the hammock, and straightened himself as regarded his hair and the fastenings of his undress jacket, buckled on his sword, and went off to the colonel's quarters, in ignorance that young Tom Snow, who had been loafing outside the tent until his master should shout for him when it was time to dress for mess, and so had heard the message which the orderly had brought, was following him, and that, when Bootles went in, he flung himself down upon the sandy ground, in blissful disregard of any plague that might be lurking there, be it Egyptian or otherwise.

The sentry on duty outside the colonel's tent, of course, noticed him, and uttered a facetious remark after the manner in which most of the Scarlet Lancers were accustomed to address the sharp-tongued, amusing little circus waif.

"'Ello, young Houp-La. What may you be a-doing off?"

"I ain't a-doing of nothing," retorted young Houp-La, civilly, "except a-waiting of my master, Capt'n Ferrers, who you see a-going into the colonel's quarters jis' now."

The sentry laughed and wheeled round on his allotted twenty yards of sentry-go, never dreaming of ordering young Tom off, for he was generally considered in the regiment as a thing of naught, beyond the fact of his being a favorite protege of Capt. Ferrers.

So there he remained, and there, with his sharp young ears pressed close to a little discrepancy in the canvas, which protected the officer commanding the Scarlet Lancers from the night dews and damps, Tom Snow, the circus waif, became cognizant of and acquainted with the details and particulars of one of the most important and dangerous missions which was intrusted to or accepted by any one of the officers and men who carried her majesty's uniform into the land of the Pharaohs in the campaign of '82.

He heard every word that passed between his master and the three gray-haired officers whom he found there.

It was not only a very difficult, but a very dangerous errand which Capt. Ferrers had been chosen to perform. The order was given in the simplest and most soldierly words, and so young Tom was able to gather its exact meaning as clearly as Bootles himself could do. In substance it was to convey a certain paper, written in cypher, to the officer commanding a body of troops lying about five miles from the Scarlet Lancers' camp, which was but a short distance from the town of Abu-Goum, held by a strong force of the rebels, under the command of Arabi himself.

To reach the other British camp the envoy must pass almost through the rebel lines, else he would find himself close under the walls of Abu-Goum on the one hand, or involved in the swamps which skirted the margin of Lake Goum on the other.

The general impressed upon Bootles the need for caution and dispatch as he intrusted the paper to his hands, not without first making him exactly acquainted with its contents in case of accident by the way, so that if the paper were damaged or rendered illegible he might not reach the other camp in ignorance of his mission.

And young Tom heard it all—every word! Not only heard, but saw! Saw the general give the paper—saw his master place it in a small pocket book of brown leather and how himself out, after a silent grip of the hands outstretched to him—saw then that he left the tent and went hastily in the direction of his own—and, seeing that, the circus waif rose up from his post of observation and followed him swiftly.

When he reached Capt. Ferrers' tent he found his master bending over a brass-bound box which stood in one corner of it—a box which Tom knew contained his revolvers.

"Is that you, Tom?" he asked.

"Yessir," answered Tom, with a salute, and advancing into the middle of the tent.

"Take my flask round to the mess tent and get it filled with brandy—and be quick."

"Yessir," said Tom.

He never hesitated an instant what he should do. The moment he entered the tent he had seen that on the chest which formed his master's table Capt. Ferrers had left