THE MYSTERIOUS SHARP-SHOOTER.

A STORY OF THE LATE WAR, BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

PART I.

Sebastian Mayne, as I remember him in college, was a great, calm-eyed young fellow, with the repose and the proportions of a Greek statue. There was fire in him, but it was seldom perceptible on the surface. His movements were for the most part deliberate and leisurely, as fitted his fair complexion and quiet manner; but he could, upon occasion, be as swift as an eagle. He was so little quarrelsome that it seemed almost impossible to provoke him, and it might have been supposed that he was wanting in spirit, but for the expression of something stronger than ordinary "spirit" in his countenance. He came of an honorable and wealthy family; his father was, I believe, a wholesale importer of silks. Sebastian was very fond of his father, and evidently very proud of him. "He's a grand old gentleman," he said to me once through the smoke of his pipe; "a man of the old school." But Sebastian himself, I fancy, was the grander gentleman of the two. I used to have an idea that the young Washington might or ought to have looked and spoken like him.

Among the fellows in the class was Chauncey Randall, a Virginian. The two were fast friends although differing radically in politics.

Randall had a sister, concerning whom it had been reported that she was the handsomest girl in Virginia. None of us had ever seen her except Fred Curwin, the Beau Brummel of our class, who had seen everybody and knew everything connected with the fashionable world. He had met her, I think, in Washington, and his account of her, though circumspect, was very engaging. She was tall, haughty, and superb—a Diana of a girl. College boys are almost preternaturally vigilant and imaginative where pretty girls are in prospect; and this Diana of the Randalls became a sort of private toast with the fellows of our set. Judicious inquiry elicited from her brother that there was a prospect of her coming to our class-day. Curwin had hinted, or, at least, left us to infer, that the relations between him and Miss Randall were of a more or less tender character; but popular opinion, secretly and even tacitly propagated, as it sometimes is in college, was inclined to give her to Sebastian Mayne, as being much better fitted than conventional and unexceptionable Fred Curwin to typify the god of the north, and win this fair southern divinity. Sebastian himself, of course, was profoundly innocent of this arrangement; he was not a lady's man, and his liking for Randall had no tinge of self-interest in it. I should not be surprised if, at that period, he would have preferred his wherry or his roan mare to all the Dianas in the country.

Class-day came in due course of time, and, sure enough, Virginia Randall came with it. As soon as she appeared, leaning on her brother's arm, and almost as tall as he, everybody admitted that their best anticipations were realized. She had black hair, and imperious black eyes, a nose slightly aqualine, and a mouth at once passionate and disdainful. She had a noble air and movement, and her glance made him upon whom it fell appear and feel insignificant. She was like a princess of Imperial Rome, and we were all ready to become her slaves, and besieged Curwin with entreaties to be introduced to her. It became speedily evident, however, that Fred was not by any means so high in her favour as he had allowed us to imagine; she treated him with a good deal of high-bred brusqueness, and the poor fellow was much mortified. Meanwhile, Sebastian had not turned up; but at length we saw his head and shoulders towering above the crowd in the College Hall, being conveyed by Randall towards the place where Virginia sat. I happened to be standing near her when he was presented to her, and I saw them look at each other for the first time. That calm, comprehensive gaze of his surveyed her with grave intentness, while they chatted together, and the colour deepened a little in his face, while she stood and looked up at him with eyes that seemed to attack and try to penetrate him, but yielded at last to the magnetism of his serenity. Afterwards she took his arm, and they walked about together—a spectacle for gods and men. If it had been any one else but Sebastian Mayne, the rest of us would have been hot with indignation, or consumed with jealousy, but, as it was we accepted the situation as natural, proper, and inevitable. Fred Curwin, indeed, did make an effort to divert the attention of the Virginian princess; but it was a painfully futile attempt. Fred had, of course, the most elaborate "spread" of the day, and Miss Randall, accompanied by her brother and Sebastian, came to it in due course. But she kept Sebastian seated beside her, and made Fred run to and fro constantly on absurd and gratuitous errands—to bring a plate, to fetch a napkin, to change an ice, to open a window, to draw a curtain; and all the while she maintained an animated conversation with the poor fellow's rival. Fred perspired, and hastened, and strove to smile and be fascinating; but all in vain. It was only too evident that she felt nothing but amused contempt for him, and that she had made up her mind that Sebastian Mayne was the only man in college with whom it was worth her while to concern herself. There is something about a class-day favorable to the rapid development of affairs of the heart, and when evening came, and the illuminations began, and Sebastian and Virginia strolled about arm-in-arm beneath the trees, it certainly looked as if their talk must be of romantic and personal matters.

Miss Randall was to remain over commencement. What Mayne's original intention may have been, I know not. He volunteered no confidence; and, though he was as honest and straightforward as any man I ever knew, and doubtless would have answered a point blank question, had I chosen to ask it, yet there was a natural dignity and reserve about him that discouraged presumptuous familiarity.

I made up my mind, according to the habit of young men, that it was to be a match; especially after Sebastian had informed me in an incidental way that he intended visiting the White Sulphur Springs during the late summer and autumn months. I began to speculate whether Virginia would give up her slaves or Sebastian his opinions.

Well, commencement came, and on the eve of that day the Randalls took their departure for New York on their way southwards. The following morning I called at Sebastian's rooms to have a chat. I knocked at the door, but when he opened it I was struck with dismay at his appearance.

He was very pale, and had evidently not slept all night. There was an expression of great anguish, stoically endured, in his face; a look as near akin to despair as a nature like his could admit. My first idea was, of course, that Miss Randall had thrown him over at the last moment. But it turned out that I was mistaken. Twoor three sealed letters lay on the table, and Sebastian had been occupied when I entered with packing his trunks. He now continued this operation, responding meanwhile only in monosyllables to my observations. But when the last trunk was strapped he sat down upon it, filled and lighted his pipe, and said, "I have had bad news."

"Thank you, old man," said; I; "I'm very sorry."

"I know it, and it's a comfort to speak to you. Last night," he continued, fixing his eyes on the carpet and puffing at his pipe, "after I got back from seeing Virginia—the Randall's off, I came back here and found a letter. It was from my father. He said that he had met with a great disaster in business, and that he had * * * Excuse me, old fellow, but it will be in all the papers to-morrow—he had embezzled a lot of money. He said that the deficiency would be discovered in a day or two, and that rather than be publicly shamed, he was resolved to—kill himself. He asked me to do what I could towards paying back the money. The letter was written day before yesterday. I hadn't more than finished reading it when a telegram came. It said that—my poor father is dead."

The manner, the voice, with which Sebastian told this miserable story, melted my boyish heart, and the tears began to run down my face. He looked up and saw it, stretched out his big hand and grasped mine. Neither of us said anything. We sat there, quite silent, for five minutes, by which time Sebastian had finished his pipe.

"I leave for New York this afternoon," he then said, in a more composed tone. "Here is a letter I have written to Miss Randall. I was to have met her this summer, but that is all out of the question now. They are not going to be at their own home before the winter, and I want to be sure she gets that letter. Do you know any one who is going—"

"I am going to New Orleans myself," I interposed. "in September; and if you will give the letter to me, I'll see that she gets it."

"I shall be very grateful, if you will," said Sebastian. "I will tell you that it is not such a letter as you need be ashamed to carry to her, and tell her the story, in my own way, instead of leaving it all to chance and circumstances."

"That will come out right," said I, with a forlorn desire to bring one ray of hope into the gloom. Sebastian turned away and made no reply.

I parted from my friend that day, and it was a long time before I saw him again. In the meantime several important events happened. The threats of war, at first made only half in earnest, assumed a darker significance. My journey to New Orleans was delayed by a severe illness of my own and the letter remained undelivered; and by the time I was in a condition personally to undertake the mission, the guns of Fort Sumter had forbidden the possibility of it. I knew not where Sebastian was, and as for the Randalls, their plantation lay directly in the path of hostilities, and it would have been useless to attempt to convey the letter by the ordinary means. But, inasmuch as I had not anything better to do, I presently enlisted, and put the letter in an inside pocket of my uniform, and went down to drill in a muddy plain in the vicinity of Washington. Several of my classmates were in the regiment to which I belonged; among them, Fred Curwin, in the capacity of second lieutenant. I used to think that he had joined the army on purpose to meet Virginia Randall, and only wondered that he had not allied himself to the confederate instead of the union forces, for his political convictions had never seemed to be very pronounced.

A year passed away, and the better part of another, and I was now captain of my company. Fred Curwin, on the other hand, was second lieutenant still. He was as good a shot as ever, but a kind of forlorn recklessness had come over him; partly owing, it may be, to the fact that all our peregrinations had never happened to bring us into the neighborhood of the Randall's plantation. Not that we could be certain, of course, that the Randall's would be at home if we called; in fact we knew that Chauncey was in the Confederate army, and had achieved distinction there. But one day we were aroused at three o'clock in the morning, marched ten miles along roads of inconceivable badness, and halted at the foot of a long, low hill, from the crest of which occasional puffs of smoke appeared, followed by the "ping" of rifle bullets entering our lines. At two o'clock in the afternoon we formed to attack; and presently we became aware that this was to be no ordinary skirmish, but a serious and bloody battle. Twenty thousand men engaged on that day; and by seven in the evening, seven thousand at least were killed or wounded. Our men carried the Confederate positions; but we were too exhausted to do much in the way of pursuit. As I mounted the crest of the hill and looked down upon the retreating grey coats on the other side, I noticed an officer, apparently a colonel, endeavouring to rally his men, and exposing himself to the fire of a thousand rifles. He remained unhurt, however, until Curwin, who was at my side, took a rifle from one of our fellows, levelled it at the officer, and fired. The officer threw back his head, his knees gave way, and he sank down on the trampled ground. The sight affected me disagreeably; I had never been able to like the idea of sharp-shooting, and I could not help wishing that Curwin had left the rifle alone. But he chuckled and delivered himself of some unsavory remarks, and we went down the hill together. When we reached the fallen officer he was lying face upwards, and was quite dead. We both recognized him immediately. It was Chauncey Randall.

It was a terrible blow for Fred Curwin, and I cannot say that I felt much compassion for him. He threw himself down by the body, and strove to persuade himself that there was still life in it, but the bullet had gone through the heart. At last he rose, shivering, and meeting my eyes with an apalling stare, "For———," he muttered, "never tell Virginia of this, if you ever meet her! She would kill me, if I didn't kill myself." I made no reply, except to order him to stay by the body until we could find means to bury it; and after darkness had put an end to the pursuit, I took a squad of our men and caused them to dig a grave for poor Chauncey beneath a tall pine on the hillside. We put his sword beside him, and drove in a piece of a shattered gun carriage at his head, and on it I wrote in pencil his name and the date; and so we left him.

[*To be concluded next week.*]

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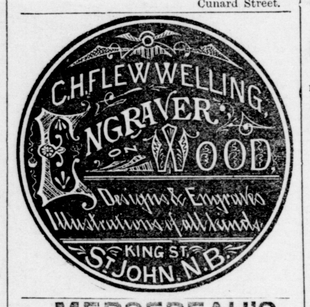

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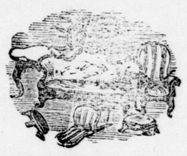
FURNITURE.  FURNITURE.

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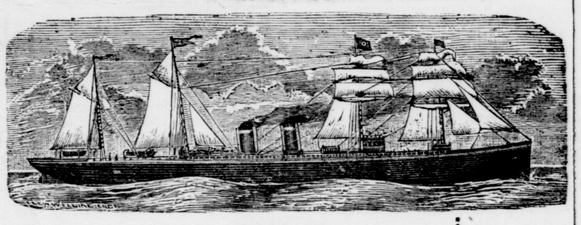

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OVER 7000 of these Mowers and Rakes have been sold in this Province.

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