

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

THE BABY TROOPER.

On the 11th of December, 1808, the chief part of the British army in Spain marched out of Salamanca. The weather was cold and winterly, and the roads almost impassable through the heavy rains: but the troops were full of hope and courage, believing they were advancing to certain victory. Confident in their general, and in their own prowess, they wished for nothing better than to meet the troops of that hostile nation which was then seeking to grasp the world. In the rear of the advancing army were numbers of large wagons, which moved on rather heavily through the rough roads. Many of them were used for the conveyance of military stores and baggage; others formed the hospital, and were filled with men who were unable to march in their proper place; through sickness or fatigue. Other wagons still, contained the wives, with their children, of the officers and soldiers who had been allowed to accompany their husbands in the campaign.

In one of these, but imperfectly protected from the piercing wind, lay a young female, who appeared to be in extreme sickness. Her delicate form seemed very ill fitted to encounter the vicissitudes and dangers of a long march in that inclement season of the year. She was the wife of Captain Gordon of the — Highlanders, whom she had accompanied from England, when his regiment was ordered to the Peninsula. The fatigue of the march through Portugal, with the effects of exposure to the unfavourable weather which prevailed, had greatly impaired a constitution that was naturally feeble. Moreover, a short time before leaving Salamanca, she had given birth to a child, and notwithstanding the weak state of her health, had passed through that crisis in a manner that surpassed the hopes of her friends. The fresh claims upon her care and attention inspired her with unexpected strength; and when it was proposed for her to remain behind, for a time at least, in Salamanca, she declared herself equal to the fatigues of the march and preferred any inconvenience to a separation from her husband. And as it appeared very uncertain what course the army would take, and whether it would return again to that city, she was allowed to accompany it in its progress. Among the few females who had accompanied the army, was the wife of a veteran sergeant in Gordon's Company, who acted as nurse to the young mother. Little Sandie, for the child had been named Alexander—was committed to her almost exclusive care; and he was fortunate in finding a kind protector, since she on whom the task properly devolved was quite unable to discharge it.

The favourable change in Mrs Gordon's health which had inspired those about her with hopes of her recovery, proved to be only delusive, and weaker and less fitted for the hardships of the march. Her danger became so apparent, that her husband at last decided to leave her at the first town on their course where proper comforts and attendance could be procured, intrusting her to the care of Mrs Maggie (as she was commonly termed), the nurse before alluded to. This was the more necessary, as the British were now approaching the vicinity of the enemy who were awaiting their advance in large force, and a general action was expected very shortly to take place. Captain Gordon felt that he should find great difficulty persuading his wife to this separation in a foreign land; but as it was the only chance of preserving her life to him, and to her infant son, he hoped to reconcile her to the measure. On the 23rd of December, the British arrived at Salamanca. South's division of the French army was encamped at a short distance, and the English general at once made his dispositions for attacking him. In this town then, Captain Gordon wished to leave his helpless family; but his purpose was prevented by the unexpected order for an immediate retreat. Intelligence had been received of the advance of several powerful bodies of troops from various quarters, threatening to enclose the British and cut off their communications. The retreat commenced early the next morning, and the troops proceeded by forced marches towards Galicia. To leave the sick lady behind at this juncture seemed still more distressing than before; but it soon became evident that, if she accompanied the troops any further, she would die under the fatigue; and, her consent with difficulty obtained, it was resolved to seek an asylum for her in the town of Castro Gonzalo, which they expected to reach on the following day. Regaining her dreary tent, her husband spent the greater part of the night in sad reflection.—Thoughts of his early life crowded upon him—of that pleasant village among the hills where the first years had been spent, and where he had first known his future wife as an amiable and beautiful child; thoughts of a long separation, of returning to find her more amiable and beautiful than ever, but an orphan and friendless—of the frank trustfulness with which she

gave her hand to be the bride of a soldier, and to share the chances and dangers of war. But a few months before, so blooming, cheerful, and happy; how sad was the contrast now! Her life, as it were, trembling doubtfully in the balance—another life dependent upon hers: and as for himself, the first battle might sever the links that bound them, and leave these loved ones more helpless and desolate still. At length, commending himself and then to the care of a protecting Providence, he dismissed his gloomy thoughts, and tried to compose himself to slumber.

But long before the late morning had broken he was roused from his sleep by the drums beating to arms; and leaping to his feet, found that the presence of a large body of the enemy's cavalry had been reported in the neighbourhood, and that an attack in force was anticipated. The British horse were in readiness to charge, and infantry were prepared to support them, if required. Later in the day, as the English were nearing the town, the French cavalry appeared at a short distance, and were immediately attacked by an inferior force of British dragoons, who succeeded in routing them, and took many prisoners. A further attack was expected, and every precaution was taken; but the day passed off without any further traces of the foe. While these things were occurring, however, an event took place which deeply concerned the chief subjects of our narrative. The troops having advanced very rapidly in the morning, to secure the shelter of the town in case of attack, a part of the wagon train had been left at a considerable distance behind, and the guard in charge of it, on discovering this, urged the drivers to greater speed. The ground being very heavy with the incessant rains, this rapid transit was both difficult and dangerous; and they had not proceeded far in this way, before the wagon in which Mrs. Gordon laid was overturned, the wheels being broken. In the hurry of the advance, alarmed at the distance at which they were left, and the sounds which reached them of cavalry-trumpets and the report of carbines, the rest of the train passed on, and the shattered vehicle remained behind. The Spaniards who drove the mules, observing this, cut the traces and instead of remaining to repair the accident, followed the others at the top of their speed. The sick lady and her infant were thus left, with no other companion than Maggie, who seemed stupified and overwhelmed at the calamity which had befallen them. Quickly recovering herself, however, she proceeded to extricate her charge from the ruins, when she found Mrs. Gordon quite insensible from the fright and shock she had sustained. In this condition, exposed to the freezing atmosphere, she remained for some time; at length returning to consciousness, she intimated faintly to her companion that she was dying, and Maggie saw that it was too true. Her first impulse was to send a messenger to Captain Gordon, that, if possible, he might witness the last moments of his wife: on hurriedly proposing this, she was answered by a look which told her mistress's dying wish most plainly.—Maggie stooped to take the infant, but the mother's arms closed convulsively around her babe, and so she left him in that embrace, hoping to find some one near who would take the sad message to Captain Gordon. She went a long distance however, without meeting with a single person; and at length, giving up the matter as hopeless, and seeking to retrace her steps, she discovered that, in her agitation, and in the fog which prevailed, she had missed the track. Finally instead of returning, as she wished to her dying mistress, she found herself on the bank of a large river, and at a considerable distance from Castro Gonzalo.

Distressed beyond measure at this misfortune, Maggie arrived towards evening at the bridge which conducted into the town. It was kept by a body of English troops, who directed her to the quarter occupied by Captain Gordon's regiment. In words broken by grief she narrated to the afflicted husband the events of the day, who immediately obtained leave to take a guard of men, and return to the spot where the accident had occurred. Arrived there, they found the body of the captain's lady: life had apparently left some hours before; the hoar-frost had settled on her hair, and the limbs were stiffened with extraordinary rigidity. Of the infant, nothing was to be seen; they searched all round the spot with torches, but in vain. He had evidently been removed by some person who had witnessed, or come up after, the mother's death. Then they noticed that the covering which had been thrown over the corpse, leaving nothing but the face exposed, was embroidered with the eagle, and bore the initials 'G. de B.' with the title of one of the French regiment. It was, in fact, the cloak of a French cavalry soldier.

A grave was hastily dug by the roadside and the remains of the departed, so youthful and beloved, were tenderly placed in it. The funeral was consecrated by the sorrow of the desolate husband, and by the tears of the rude soldiers who joined in it, and then they left her to her quiet slumber. The peasants in the neighbourhood, hearing the melancholy history, placed a rude cross to mark the site of the tomb.

Shortly after Maggie's departure in quest of a messenger, a troop of the enemy's cavalry

that was hovering on the rear of the retreating army, arrived at the scene of the accident we have related. They found Mrs. Gordon at the point of death, and she expired in their presence. The officer in command, observing that the infant she embraced was living, and apparently healthy, compassionated its forsaken condition. Dismounting, he took the child from the grasp of his ill-fated mother, and turning gaily to his men, held him out in his arms, saying:

'Now, mes enfans, which of you will volunteer to be nurse to this bantling? This young leopard's cub shall have the eagle for a foster mother. What say you, my friends?' A loud laugh followed the suggestion, and several of the troop sprang forward to ease their leader of his strange burden. It was committed to the care of a young corporal, who said, as he received the child:

'There will be some work for Jeanne here, mes freres, which will find her better employment than telling her eternal tales about her husband, who was killed at Marengo, and her beau garcon, who got himself drowned in the Seine.'

'Good, Francois,' said the captain. 'Jeanne shall nurse him for us; and, since these English have left him here to die, we will adopt him, messieurs, as our child, and he shall be called Le Cavalier Poupon'—(The Baby Trooper.)

So saying, he covered the lifeless mother with his own cloak, after gazing for a few moments with great interest upon her features. The tears were glistening in his eyes, when he remounted, saying to himself as he did so:

'So young, and so unhappy! But it is the fate of war.'

Towards the close of the summer of 1815, as traveller, youthful in appearance, but bearing the marks of suffering and ill-health, arrived at a pleasant village in the west of Scotland. He was dressed in plain attire, but his bearing at once denoted his military profession. It was one of those arrivals so common at that period in every part of that kingdom, when soldiers, wounded in the closing battle of the French wars, came wearily to their native homes, many of them to a speedy death, and many more to spend their remaining days as maimed and disabled witnesses to 'the glory of war.'

The traveller in question was Captain, now Major Gordon. He had fought with his regiment throughout the whole war in the Peninsula; and when, in 1814, it was ordered to America, he remained behind at Vienna. The loss of his wife, and the mysterious disappearance of his child, had sensibly affected his health and spirits; and in the engagements in which he had taken part, he fought with a reckless bravery that seemed to court death. Latterly, however, his mind, tempered by time and religion, had become less gloomy; and his stay on the continent, after peace had been proclaimed, was partly to recruit his enfeebled constitution, and partly to institute some enquiries as to the fate of his child. In the campaign which followed the escape from Elba, Major Gordon obtained permission to attach himself to another Highland regiment, and fought in the final struggle at Waterloo, where he was severely wounded. He spent many weeks in Brussels in a most critical condition; and when at last he was able to travel by easy stages towards his own country, it was with the conviction that he could not long survive his injuries. Thus, after seven years' absence, he revisited the place of his birth. His sole surviving relative was an aged aunt, and with her, among the scenes of his youth and early love, he wished to spend the rest of his time on earth.

Shortly after his arrival here, he received a visit from one who had been connected with his greatest misfortune. Poor Maggie, her husband having been killed in battle three years before, had returned a widow to her own country. A small pension, granted her in consideration of her husband's services, provided for her wants; and Maggie well skilled in nursing and kind of heart, was the general friend of the whole country-side. When she heard of Major Gordon's return, she trudged over thirty miles of hill and moor to the village where he was living. The meeting pleased the invalid, even while it freshened the remembrance of his sorrows. He told Maggie of the purpose for which he had remained on the continent, and lamented that his present enfeebled state would prevent him from carrying it out. His thoughts dwelt incessantly on his lost child; he continually referred to him in his conversation, and in his restless slumber often uttered some broken exclamation respecting him. Maggie grieved sincerely at the shattered state in which she found the major, and would readily have employed all her skill in his behalf; but his relative, somewhat jealous of her attentions, claimed the undivided honour of nursing the wounded soldier. Thus thwarted in her good intentions, Maggie began to think whether she could not benefit the Major by another service. The idea seemed at first too visionary; but often as it was banished, it intruded itself once more with increased weight. So, from thinking it over in her own mind—for she mentioned her thoughts to no one—she at length decided upon a course which few besides herself would have been bold enough to follow.

To persons less sanguine, the chance of suc-

cess would probably have seemed so small that they would never have made the attempt. So many things might have occurred to render the inquiry fruitless—how unlikely that soldiers on the march, and belonging to the enemy, should encumber themselves with an infant; or, if they did, how probable that it would only be to leave it at the first house they came to; and how hopeless the chance of its surviving, deprived of maternal care, and exposed to the severity of the winter. Still, she determined to set forth upon the search. As for the journey, she thought but little of that, accustomed to long marches and hard fare, and her board of savings would suffice to purchase necessities by the way. So, secretly furnishing herself with the French cavalry-cloak which had been found covering the dead body of the mother—and which had been religiously preserved by Major Gordon—and pleading engagements in her own neighbourhood, she bade him farewell for a time. On the next day, having put her home under charge of a neighbour, and provided herself with what she thought necessary, she started on her adventurous journey, and made her way to Leith. Here she found a friend in the person of the port-master, to whom she related the object of her journey, and who kindly undertook to provide her a passport, and make the needful arrangements for her. A passage was procured in a vessel that was to sail in a day or two for Calais, the captain of which, having some idea of her business when Maggie prudently wished to know the fare beforehand, declared resolutely that he would take nothing for her voyage.

After a rough passage, Maggie found her self safely landed on the shores of France, a stranger in a strange country, and ignorant of the language. She was not one, however, to flinch in her undertaking, and she set out forthwith on the road to Paris. It was now the beginning of November, and the weather was very unpropitious for travelling on foot: but she was an old campaigner, and with her little bundle of necessities sometimes strapped on her shoulders like a knapsack, and sometimes balanced on her head, she trudged cheerfully along the road. Without meeting with many adventures, or suffering any great inconvenience, Maggie arrived at the capital, after a steady march of nine days. Her first business was to act on the advice of her friend at Leith, and make her object known at the office of the British consul. After a day's delay, she was admitted to an interview with the consul in person, who listened to her narrative with great interest, and expressed his willingness to help her to the utmost of his power.

'But I much fear,' said he, 'that there will be difficulties in the way of your having no idea. The cloak you show me has apparently belonged to a French officer of a certain regiment of cavalry, and if that officer could be found, he would be the most likely person to inform you as to the fate of the child. The best way of proceeding, then, would be to enquire of the colonel of that regiment whether any officer has been connected with it, whose name corresponds with these initials. But the French army has been almost entirely disbanded: Paris is occupied, as you see, by the allied armies; and thus it will be no easy matter to find out where the individual may be who recently commanded this regiment; he will, most probably, have left Paris. The only source from which you can get information on this point would be the perfect of police, and I should advise you to apply at his office. But stay—as you are a stranger in Paris, it will perhaps save some delay if I communicate with the perfect, and you can inquire here to-morrow for his reply.'

Maggie thanked the consul, and retired. The next day as soon as the office was opened, she was in attendance; but the consul's note had been merely acknowledged, and no definite answer had been sent. For several days she repeated her visits; still no further reply came. At last, information was forwarded that Monsieur Garnier, the officer in question, had lived for some months in the Rue de —, but having reason to fear the new government, he had disappeared within the last few days, and was supposed to have withdrawn himself from the capital. The communication concluded with the promise, that if any intelligence respecting him should reach the perfect, it should be conveyed to the consul. Maggie had some hope that, by inquiring at his late residence, she might obtain some particulars as to his place of abode; and she proceeded thither, in charge of a clerk from the consulate, who was appointed to accompany her. But their enquiries at the hotel mentioned were fruitless; the colonel had left it some time before, without giving any address, or any indication of his further residence. Thus stopped at the onset of her enquiries, Maggie now began to feel the hopeless character of the errand on which she had come. She endeavoured to find out other members of the same regiment; but it had suffered severely in the late battle, and the survivors were disbanded, and dispersed throughout the country, so that she was still unsuccessful. The consul, thinking the search altogether in vain, advised her to return to Scotland, and he would undertake to inform Major Gordon, if anything respecting the child should come to light. But Maggie, unwilling to give up the search, had