

## VIA CRUCIS.<sup>1</sup>

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### I.



HE sun was setting on the fifth day of May, in the year of our Lord's grace eleven hundred and forty-five. In the little garden between the outer wall and the moat of Stoke Regis Manor, a lady slowly walked along the narrow path between high rose-bushes trained upon the masonry, and a low flower-bed, divided into many little squares, planted alternately with flowers and sweet herbs on one side, and bordered with budding violets on the other. From the line where the flowers ended, spiked rushes grew in sharp disorder to the edge of the deep-green water in the moat. Beyond the water stretched the close-cropped sward; then came great oak-trees, shadowy still in their spring foliage; and then corn-land and meadow-land, in long green waves of rising tilth and pasture, as far as a man could see.

The sun was setting, and the level rays reddened the lady's golden hair, and fired the softness of her clear blue eyes. She walked with a certain easy undulation, in which there were both strength and grace; and though she could barely have been called young, none would have dared to say that she was past maturity. Features which had been coldly perfect and hard in early youth, and which might grow sharp in old age, were smoothed and rounded in the full fruit-time of life's summer. As the gold deepened in the mellow air, and tinged the lady's hair and eyes, it wrought in her face changes of which she knew nothing. The beauty of a white-marble statue suddenly changed to burnished gold might be beauty still, but of different expression and meaning. There is always something devilish in the too great profusion of precious metal—something that suggests greed, spoil, gain, and all that he lives for who strives for wealth; and sometimes, by the mere absence of gold or silver, there is dignity, simplicity, even solemnity.

Above the setting sun, tens of thousands of little clouds, as light and fleecy as swan's-

down, some dazzling bright, some rosy-colored, some, far to eastward, already purple, streamed across the pale sky in the mystic figure of a vast wing, as if some great archangel hovered below the horizon, pointing one jeweled pinion to the firmament, the other down and unseen in his low flight. Just above the feathery oak-trees, behind which the sun had dipped, long streamers of red and yellow and more imperial purple shot out to right and left. Above the moat's broad water, the quick, dark May-flies chased one another, in dashes of straight lines, through the rosy haze; and as the sinking sun shot a last farewell glance between the trunks of the oak-trees on the knoll, the lady stood still, and turned her smooth features to the light. There was curiosity in her look, expectation and some anxiety, but there was no longing. A month had passed since Raymond Warde had ridden away with his half-dozen squires and servants to do homage to the Empress Maud. Her court was, indeed, little more than a show, and Stephen ruled in wrongful possession of the land; but here and there a sturdy and honest knight was still to be found, who might, perhaps, be brought to do homage for his lands to King Stephen, but who would have felt that he was a traitor, and no true man, had he not rendered the homage of fealty to the unhappy lady who was his rightful sovereign. And one of these was Raymond Warde, whose great-grandfather had ridden with Robert the Devil to Jerusalem, and had been with him when he died in Nicæa; and his grandsire had been in the thick of the press at Hastings, with William of Normandy, wherefore he had received the lands and lordship of Stoke Regis in Hertfordshire; and his name is on the Battle Abbey Roll to this day.

During ten years Stephen of Blois had reigned over England with varying fortune, alternately victor and vanquished, now holding his great enemy, Robert of Gloucester, a prisoner and hostage, now himself in the empress's power, loaded with chains, and languishing in the keep of Bristol Castle.

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Yet of late the tide had turned in his favor; and though Gloucester still kept up the show of warfare for his half-sister's sake,—as, indeed, he fought for her so long as he had breath,—the worst of the civil war was over; the partizans of the empress had lost faith in her sovereignty, and her cause was but lingering in the shadow of death. The nobles of England had judged Stephen's character from the hour in which King Henry died, and they knew him to be a brave soldier, a desperate fighter, an indulgent man, and a weak ruler.

Finding themselves confronted by a usurper who had no great talent to recommend him, nor much political strength behind his brilliant personal courage, their first instinct was to refuse submission to his authority, and to drive him out as an impostor. It was not until they had been chilled and disappointed by the scornful coldness of the empress-queen's imperious bearing that they saw how much pleasanter it would be to rule Stephen than to serve Maud. Yet Gloucester was powerful, and, with his feudal retainers and devoted followers and a handful of loyal independent knights, he was still able to hold Oxford, Gloucester, and the northernmost part of Berkshire for his sister.

Now, in the early spring of this present year, the great earl had gone forth, with his followers and a host of masons and laboring-men, to build a new castle on the height by Farringdon, where good King Alfred had carved the great white horse by tearing the turf from the chalky hill, for an everlasting record of victory. Broadly and boldly Gloucester had traced the outer wall and bastions, the second rampart within that, and the vast fortress which was to be thus trebly protected. The building was to be the work of weeks, not months, and, if it were possible, of days rather than of weeks. The whole was to be a strong outpost for a fresh advance, and neither gold nor labor was to be spared in the execution of the plan. Gloucester pitched his sister's camp and his own tent upon the grassy eminence that faced the castle. Thence he himself directed and commanded, and thence the Empress Maud, sitting beneath the lifted awning of her imperial tent, could see the gray stone rising, course upon course, string upon string, block upon block, at a rate that reminded her of that Eastern trick which she had seen at the emperor's court, performed by a turbaned juggler from the East, who made a tree grow from the seed to the leafy branch and

full ripe fruit while the dazed courtiers who looked on could count fivescore.

Thither, as to a general trysting-place, the few loyal knights and barons went up to do homage to their sovereign lady, and to grasp the hand of the bravest and gentlest man who trod English ground; and thither, with the rest, Raymond Warde was gone, with his only son, Gilbert, then only eighteen years of age, whom this chronicle chiefly concerns; and Raymond's wife, the Lady Goda, was left in the manor-house of Stoke Regis, under the guard of a dozen men-at-arms, mostly stiff-jointed veterans of King Henry's wars, and under the more effectual protection of several hundred sturdy bondmen and yeomen, devoted, body and soul, to their master, and ready to die for his blood or kin. For throughout Hertfordshire and Essex and Kent there dwelt no Norman baron nor any earl who was beloved of his Saxon people as was the Lord of Stoke; wherefore his lady felt herself safe in his absence, though she knew well enough that only a small part of that devotion was for herself.

There are people who seem able to go through life, with profit to themselves, if not to others, by a sort of vicarious grace arising out of the devotion wasted on them by their nearest and dearest, and dependent upon the success, the honor, and the reputation of those who cherish them. The Lady Goda set down to her own full credit the faithful attachment which her husband's Saxon swains not only felt for him, but owed him in return for his unchanging kindness and impartial justice; and she took the deserts to herself, as such people will, with a whole-souled determination to believe that it was her due, though she knew that she deserved none of it.

She had married Raymond Warde without loving him, being ambitious of his name and honors, when his future had seemed brilliant in the days of good King Henry. She had borne him an only son, who worshiped her with a chivalric devotion that was almost childlike in its blindness; and the most that she could feel, in return, was a sort of motherly vanity in his outward being; and this he accepted as love, though it was as far from that as devotion to self is from devotion to another—as greed is far from generosity. She had not been more than sixteen years of age when she had married, being the youngest of many sisters, left almost dowerless when their father had departed on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land,

from which he had never returned. Raymond Warde had loved her for her beauty, which was real, and for her character, which was entirely the creation of his own imagination; and with the calm, unconscious fatuity which so often underlies the characters of honest and simple men, he had continued throughout his married life to believe that his wife's affection, if neither very deep nor very high, was centered upon himself and upon Gilbert. Any man a jot less true and straightforward would have found out the utter emptiness of such belief within a year. Goda had been bitterly disappointed by the result of her marriage, so far as her real tastes and ambitions were concerned. She had dreamed of a court; she was condemned to the country. She loved gaiety; she was relegated to dullness. And the Lord of Stoke was strong rather than attractive, imposing rather than seductive, and he had never dreamed of that small coin of flattery which greedy and dissatisfied natures require, at all costs, when their real longings are unfulfilled. It is their nature to give little; it is their nature and their delight to ask much, and to take all that is within their reach. So it came to pass that Goda took her husband's loving generosity and her son's devotion as matters foregone and of course, which were her due, and which might stay hunger, though they could not satisfy her vanity's large appetite; and she took, besides, such other things, both good and bad, as she found in her path, especially and notably the heart of Arnold de Curboil, a widowed knight, cousin to the Archbishop of Canterbury who had crowned Stephen king, after swearing allegiance to Maud. This Arnold, who had followed his great cousin in supporting King Stephen's cause, had received for his service broad lands, both farm and forest, in Hertfordshire, bordering upon the hereditary estates of the Wardes; and in the turmoil and chaos of the long civil war, his word, at first without Raymond's knowledge, had more than once saved the latter's little castle from siege and probable destruction. Warde, in his loyalty to the rightful sovereign, had, indeed, rather drawn back from the newcomer's friendship than made advances to win it; but Raymond had yielded, in the end, to his wife's sarcasms, and to his own sense of obligation, as he began to find out how, again and again, in the turning tides of civil strife, his neighbor, though of opposite conviction, served him by protecting his bondmen, his neat cattle, and his growing crops from pillage and destruction. Ray-

mond did not trace such acts of neighborly kindness to the day when, hawking with his lady and little Gilbert, then hardly big enough to sit upon a horse, they had been overtaken by a winter storm not far from Arnold's lands, and when Arnold himself, returning from a journey, had bidden them take shelter in a small outlying manor-house, where he was to spend the night, and whither his servants had brought his little daughter Beatrix to meet her father. Raymond had accepted the offer for his wife's sake, and the two houses had made acquaintance on that evening, by the blazing fire in the little hall.

Before supper, the men had talked together with that sort of cheery confidence which exists almost before the first meeting between men who are neighbors and of the same rank, and the Lady Goda had put in a word now and then, as she sat in the high-backed chair, drying the bright blue cloth skirt of her gown before the crackling logs; and meanwhile, too, young Gilbert, who had his mother's hair and his father's deep-set eyes, walked round and round the solemn little dark-faced girl, who sat upon a settle by herself, clad in a green cloth dress, which was cut in the fashion of grown-up women, and having two short, stiff plaits of black hair hanging down behind the small coverchief that was tied under her fat chin. And as the boy, in his scarlet doublet and green cloth hose, walked backward and forward, stopping, moving away, then standing still to show off his small hunting-knife, drawing it half out of its sheath, and driving it home again with a smart push of the palm of his hand, the little girl's round black eyes followed all his movements with silent and grave curiosity. She was brotherless, he had no sisters, and both had been brought up without companions, so that each was an absolute novelty to the other; and when Gilbert threw his round cap, spinning on itself, up to the brown rafters of the dim, fire-lit chamber, and caught it upon one finger as it came down again, the little Beatrix laughed aloud. This seemed to him nothing less than an invitation, and he immediately sat down beside her on the settle, holding his cap in his hands, and began to ask her how she was called, and whether she lived in that place all the year round; and before long they were good friends, and were talking of plovers' eggs and kingfishers' nests, and of the time when they should each have a hawk of their own and a horse, and each a hound and a footman.

But when supper was over, and a serving-woman had taken the little Beatrix away to sleep in the women's upper chamber, and when the steward of the manor-farm, and his wife, and the retainers and servants, who had eaten and drunk their fill at the lower end of the hall, were all gone to their quarters in the outbuildings,—and when a bed had been made for Gilbert, in a corner near the great chimneypiece, by filling with fresh straw a large linen sack which was laid upon the chest in which the bag was kept during the daytime, and was then covered with a fine Holland sheet and two thick woolen blankets, under which the boy was asleep in five minutes,—then the two knights and the lady were left to themselves in their great carved chairs before the fire. But the Lord of Stoke, who was a strong man and heavy, and had eaten well and had drunk both ale and Gascony wine at supper, stretched out his feet to the fire-dogs, and rested his elbows upon the arms of his chair, and matched his hands together by the thumbs, and by the forefingers, and by the other fingers, one by one; and little by little the musical, false voice of his lady, and the singularly gentle and unctuous tones of his host, Arnold de Curboil, blended together and lost themselves, just as the gates of dreamland softly closed behind him.

The Lady Goda, who had been far too tired to think of riding home that night, was not in the least sleepy, and, moreover, she was profoundly interested in what Sir Arnold had to say, while he was much too witty to say anything which should not interest her. He talked of the court, and of the fashions, and of great people whom he knew intimately and whom the Lady Goda longed to know; and from time to time he managed to convey to her the idea that the beauties of King Stephen's court would stand in a poor comparison with her, if her husband could be induced to give up his old-fashioned prejudices and his allegiance to the Empress Maud. Lady Goda had once been presented to the empress, who had paid very little attention to her, compared with the interest she showed in Sir Raymond himself. At the feast which had followed the formal audience, she had been placed between a stout German widow and an Italian abbot from Normandy, who had talked to each other across her, in dog-Latin, in a way which had seemed to her very ill-mannerly; and the German lady had eaten pieces of game-pie with her knife, instead of using her fingers, as a lady should before forks were

invented. On the following morning the Lady Goda had been taken away again by her husband, and her experiences of court life had been brought to an abrupt close. If the great earl, Robert of Gloucester, had deigned to bestow a word upon her, instead of looking through her with his beautiful calm blue eyes at an imaginary landscape beyond, her impressions of life at the empress's court might have been very different, and she might ever afterward have approved her husband's loyalty. But although she had bestowed unusual pains upon the arrangement of her splendid golden hair, and had boxed the ears of a clumsy tirewoman with so much vivacity that her own hand ached perceptibly three hours afterward, yet the great earl paid no more attention to her than if she had been a Saxon dairy-maid. These things, combined with the fact that she unexpectedly found the ladies of the empress's court wearing pocket-sleeves shaped like overgrown mandolins, and almost dragging on the rushes as they walked, whereas her own were of the old-fashioned open cut, had filled her soul with bitterness against the legitimate heir to King Henry's throne, and had made the one-sided barrier between herself and her husband—which she could see so plainly, but which was quite invisible to him—finally and utterly impassable. He not only bored her himself, but he had given her over to be bored by others, and from that day no such thing as even the mildest affection for him was to be thought of on her side.

It was no wonder that she listened with breathless interest to all Sir Arnold told her, and watched with delight the changing expression of his subtle face, contrasted at every point with the bold, grave features of the Lord of Stoke, solemnly asleep beside her. And Curboil, on his side, was not only flattered, as every man is when a beautiful woman listens to him long and intently, but he saw also that her beauty was of an unusual and very striking kind. Too straight, too cold, too much like marble, yet with hair almost too golden, and a mouth like a small red wound; too much of every quality to be natural, and yet without fault or flaw, and too vivid not to delight the tired taste of the man of pleasure of that day, who had seen the world from London to Rome, and from Rome to the court of Henry V.

And she, on her side, saw in him the type to which she would naturally have been attracted had she been free to make her choice of a husband. Contrasted with the



man of action, of few words, of few feelings and strong ones, she saw the many-sided man of the world, whose mere versatility was a charm, and the thought of whose manifold experiences had in it a sort of mysterious fascination. Arnold de Curboil was, above all, a man of tact and light touch, accustomed to the society of women, and skilled in the art of appealing to that unsatisfied vanity which is the basis of most imperfect feminine characters. There was nothing weak about him, and he was, at least, as brave as most men, besides being more skilful than the majority in the use of weapons. His small, well-shaped, olive-tinted hand could drive a sword with a quicker thrust than Raymond Warde's, and with as sure an aim, though there might not be the same massive strength behind it. In the saddle he had not the terrible grip of the knee which could make a strong horse shrink and quiver and groan aloud; but few riders of his day were more profoundly skilled in the art of showing a poor mount to good advantage, and of teaching a good one to use his own powers to the utmost. When Warde had ridden a horse six months, the beast was generally gone in the fore quarters, and broken-winded, if not dead outright; but in the same time Curboil would have ridden the same horse twice as far, and would have doubled his value. And so in many other ways, with equal chances, the one seemed to squander where the other turned everything to his own advantage. Standing, Sir Arnold was scarcely of medium height, but seated he was not noticeably small; and, like many men of short stature, he bestowed a constant and thoughtful care upon his person and appearance, which resulted in a sort of permanent compensation. His dark beard was cut to a point, and so carefully trimmed as to remind one of those smoothly clipped trees representing peacocks and dragons, which have been the delight of the Italian gardener ever since the days of Pliny. He wore his hair neither long nor short, but the silky locks were carefully parted in the middle, and smoothed back in rich dark waves. There was something almost irritating in their unnatural smoothness, in the perfect transparency of the man's healthy olive complexion, in the mouse-like sleekness of his long, arching eyebrows, and in the complete self-satisfaction and confidence of his rather insolent reddish-brown eyes. His straight, round throat, well proportioned, well set upon his shoulders, and as transparently smooth as his

own forehead, was thrown into relief by the exquisite gold embroidery that edged the shirt of finest Flemish linen. He wore a close-fitting tunic of fine scarlet cloth, with tight sleeves, slightly turned back to display his shapely wrists; it was gathered to his waist by a splendid sword-belt, made of linked and enameled plates of silver, the work of a skilled Byzantine artist, each plate representing in rich colors a little scene from the life and passion of Christ. The straight, cross-hilted sword stood leaning against the wall near the great chimney-piece, but the dagger was still at the belt, a marvel of workmanship, a wonder of temper, a triumph of Eastern art, when almost all art was Eastern. The hilt of solid gold, eight-sided and notched, was cross-chiseled in a delicate but deep design, picked out with rough gems, set in cunning irregularity; the guard, a hollowed disk of steel, graven and inlaid in gold with Cufic characters; the blade, as long as a man's arm from the elbow to the wrist-joint, forged of steel and silver by a smith of Damascus, well balanced, slender, with deep blood-channels scored on each side to within four fingers of the thrice-hardened point, that could prick as delicately as a needle, or pierce fine mail like a spike driven by a sledge-hammer. The tunic fell in folds to the knee, and the close-fitted cloth hose were of a rich dark brown. Sir Arnold wore short riding-boots of dark purple leather, having the tops worked round with a fine scarlet lacing; but the spur-leathers were of the same color as the boot, the spurs themselves of steel, small, sharp, unornamented, and workmanlike.

Six years had passed since that evening, and still, when the Lady Goda closed her eyes and thought of Sir Arnold, she saw him as she had seen him then, with every line of his expression, every detail of his dress, sitting beside her in the warm fire-light, leaning forward a little in his chair, and talking to her in a tone of voice that was meant to be monotonous to the sleeper's ear, but not by any means to her own. Between Warde and Curboil the acquaintance had matured—had been, in a measure, forced in its growth by circumstances and mutual obligations; but it had never ripened into the confidence of friendship on Warde's side, while on Sir Arnold's it had been only a well-played comedy to hide his rising hatred for the Lady Goda's husband. And she, on her side, played her part as well. An alliance in which ambition had held the place of heart could not remain an alliance at all when am-

bition had been altogether disappointed. She hated her husband for having disappointed her; she despised him for having made nothing of his many gifts and chances, for clinging to an old cause, for being old-fashioned, for having seen much and taken nothing,—which makes “rich eyes and poor hands,”—for being slow, good-natured, kind-hearted, and a prey to all who wished to get anything from him. She reflected with bitterness that for a matter of seven or eight years of waiting, and a turn of chance which would have meant happiness instead of misery, she might have had the widowed Sir Arnold for a husband, and have been the Archbishop of Canterbury’s cousin, high in favor with the winning side in the civil war, and united to a man who would have known how to flatter her cold nature into a fiction of feeling, instead of wasting on her the almost exaggerated respect with which a noble passion envelops its object, but which, to most women, becomes, in the end, unspeakably wearisome.

Many a time during those six years had she and Sir Arnold met and talked as on the first night. Once, when the Empress Maud had taken King Stephen prisoner, and things looked ill for his followers, Warde had insisted that his neighbor should come over to Stoke Regis, as being a safer place than his own castle; and once again, when Stephen had the upper hand, and Sir Raymond was fighting desperately under Gloucester, his wife had taken her son, and the priest, and some of her women, and had ridden over to ask protection of Sir Arnold, leaving the manor to take care of itself.

At first Curboil had constantly professed admiration for Warde’s mental and physical gifts; but little by little, tactfully feeling his distance, he had made the lady meet his real intention half-way by confiding to him all that she suffered, or fancied that she suffered,—which with some women is the same thing,—in being bound for life to a man who had failed to give her what her ambition craved. Then, one day, the keyword had been spoken. After that, they never ceased to hope that Raymond Warde might come to an untimely end.

During those years Gilbert had grown from a boy to a man, unsuspicious, worshipping his mother as a kind of superior being, but loving his father with all that profound instinct of mutual understanding which makes both love and hatred terrible within the closer degrees of consanguinity. As time went by, and the little Beatrix grew

tall and straight and pale, Gilbert loved her quite naturally, as she loved him—two young people of one class, without other companions, and very often brought together for days at a time, in the isolated existence of medieval castles. Perhaps Gilbert never realized just how much of his affection for his mother was the result of her willingness to let him fall in love with Beatrix. But the possibility of discussing the marriage was another excuse for those long conversations with Sir Arnold which had now become a necessary part of Goda’s life, and it made the frequent visits and meetings in the hawking season seem quite natural to the unsuspecting Sir Raymond. In hunting with Sir Arnold, he had more than one narrow escape. Once, when almost at close quarters with an old boar, he was stooping down to meet the tusker with a low thrust. His wife and Sir Arnold were some twenty paces behind him, and all three had become separated from the huntsmen. Seeing the position and the solitude, the Lady Goda turned her meaning eyes to her companion. An instant later Sir Arnold’s boar-spear flew, like a cloth-yard arrow, straight at Sir Raymond’s back. But in that very instant, too, as the boar rushed upon him, Warde sprang to one side, and, almost dropping to his knee, ran the wild beast through with his hunting-sword. The spear flew harmless, unseen and unheard, over his head, and lost itself in the dead leaves twenty yards beyond him. On another day, Raymond, riding along, hawk on wrist, ten lengths before the others, as was his wont, did not notice that they gradually fell behind, until he halted in a narrow path of the forest, looked round, and found himself alone. He turned his horse’s head and rode back a few yards, when suddenly three masked men, whom he took for highway robbers, sprang up in his path, and fell upon him with long knives. But they had misreckoned their distance by a single yard, and their time by one second, and when they were near enough to strike, his sword was already in his hand. The first man fell dead; the second turned and fled, with a deep flesh-wound in his shoulder; the third followed without striking a blow; and Sir Raymond rode on unhurt, meditating upon the uncertainty of the times. When he rejoined his wife and friend, he found them dismounted and sitting side by side on a fallen tree, talking low and earnestly, while the footmen and falconers were gathered together in a little knot at some distance. As they heard

his voice, Goda started with a little cry, and Arnold's dark face turned white; but by the time he was beside them they were cool again, and smiled, and asked him whether he had lost his way. Raymond said nothing of what had happened to him, fearing to startle the delicate nerves of his lady; but late on the following night, when Sir Arnold was alone in his bedchamber, a man, ghastly white from loss of blood, lifted the heavy curtain, and told his story in a low voice.

## II.

Now Raymond and his son had gone over into Berkshire, to the building of the great castle at Farringdon, as has been said; and for a while Sir Arnold remained in his hold, and very often he rode over alone to Stoke, and spent many hours with the Lady Goda, both in the hall and in the small garden by the moat. The priest, and the steward, and the men-at-arms, and the porter, were all used to see him there often enough when Sir Raymond was at home, and they thought no evil because he came now to hear the lonely lady company; for the manners of those days were simple.

But on a morning at the end of April there came a messenger from King Stephen, bidding all earls, barons, bannerets, and knights join him, with their fighting men, in Oxford, upon their oath of fealty. For form's sake, the messenger came to Stoke Regis, as not admitting that any Norman knight should not be on the king's side. And, the drawbridge being down, he rode under the gateway, and when the trumpeter who was with him had blown three blasts, he delivered his message. Then the steward, bowing deeply, answered that his lord was absent on a journey; and the messenger turned and rode away, without bite or sup. But, riding on to Stortford Castle, he found Sir Arnold, and delivered the king's bidding with more effect, and was hospitably treated with meat and drink. Sir Arnold armed himself slowly in full mail, saving his head; for the weather was strangely warm, and he would ride in his hat rather than wear the heavy steel cap with the broad nasal. Before an hour was past, he was mounted, with his men, and his footmen were marching before and behind him on the broad Hertford road. But he had sent a messenger secretly to the Lady Goda, to tell her that he was gone; and after that she heard nothing for many days.

In the morning, and after dinner, and be-

fore sunset she came every day to the little garden under the west wall of the manor, and looked long toward the road—not that she wished Sir Raymond back, nor that she cared when Gilbert came, but she well knew that the return of either would mean that the fighting was over, and that Sir Arnold, too, would be at leisure to go home.

And on that fifth of May, as the sun was going down, she stood still and looked out toward the road for the tenth time since Curboil had gone to join the king. And the sun sank lower, and still she saw nothing; and she felt the chill of the damp evening air, and would have turned to go in, but something held her. Far up the road, on the brow of the rising ground, she saw a tiny spark, a little dancing flame like the corpse-candles that run along the graves on a summer's night—first one, then all at once three, then, as it seemed to her, a score at least, swaying a little above a compact, dark mass against the red sky. The lights were like little stars rising and falling on the horizon, and always just above a low, black cloud. A moment more, and the evening breeze out of the west brought a long-drawn harmony of chanting to the Lady Goda's ear, the high, sweet notes of youthful voices sustained by the rich counterpoint of many grown men's tones. She started, and held her breath, shivered a little, and snatched at the rose-bush beside her, so that the thorns struck through the soft green gauntlet and pricked her, though she felt nothing. There was death in the air; there was death in those moving lights; there was death in the minor wail of the monks' voices. In the first moment of understanding, it was Arnold whom they were bringing home to her, slain in battle by her lawful husband, or by Gilbert, her son; it was Arnold whom they were bringing back to her who loved him, that she might wash his wounds with her tears, and dry his damp brow with her glorious hair. Wide-eyed and silent, as the train came near, she moved along by the moat to meet the procession at the drawbridge, not understanding yet, but not letting one movement of the men, one flicker of the lights, one quaver of the deep chant, escape her reeling senses. Then, all at once, she was aware that Gilbert walked bareheaded before the bier, half wrapped in a long black cloak that swept the greensward behind him. As she turned the last bastion before reaching the drawbridge, the funeral procession was moving along by the outer edge of the moat, and there was only the broad water between

her and them, reflecting the lights of the moving tapers, the dark cowls of the monks, the white surplices of the song-boys. They moved slowly, and she, as in a dream, followed them on the other side with little steps, wondering, fearing, starting now with a wild thrill of liberty at last, now struggling with a half-conventional, half-hysterical sob, that rose in her throat at the thought of death so near. She had lived with him, she had played the long comedy of love with him, she had loathed him in her heart, she had smiled at him with well-trained eyes; and now she was free to choose, free to love, free to be Arnold's wife. And yet she had lived with the dead man; and in the far-off past there were little tender lights of happiness, half real, half played, but never forgotten, upon which she had once taught her thoughts to dwell tenderly and sadly. She had loved the dead man in the first days of marriage as well as her cold and unawakened nature could love at all—if not for himself, at least for the hopes of vanity built on his name. She had hated him in secret, but she could not have hated him so heartily had there not once been a little love to turn so fiercely sour. She could not have trained her eyes to smile at him so gently had she not once smiled for his own sake. And so, when they brought him dead to the gate of his own house, his wife had still some shreds of memories for weeds to eke out a show of sorrow.

She passed through the postern in the small round tower beside the gateway, knowing that when she came out under the portcullis the funeral train would be just reaching the other end of the bridge. The little vaulted room in the lower story of the tower was not four steps in width across from door to door; but it was almost dark, and there the Lady Goda stopped one moment before she went out to meet the mourners. Standing still in the dimness, she pressed her gloved hands to her eyes with all her might, as though to concentrate her thoughts and her strength. Then she threw back her arms, and looked up through the gloom, and almost laughed; and she felt something just below her heart that stifled her like a great joy. Then all at once she was calm, and touched her eyes again with her gloved hands, but gently now, as though smoothing them and preparing them to look upon what they must see presently. She opened the little door, and was suddenly standing in the midst of the frightened herd of retainers and servants, while the last

strains of the dirge came echoing under the deep archway. At that instant another sound rent the air—the deep bell-note of the great bloodhounds, chained in the courtyard from sunrise to sunset; and it sank to a wail, and the wail broke to a howl, dismal, ear-rending, wild. Before it had died away, one of the Saxon bondwomen shrieked aloud, and the next took up the cry, and then another, as a likewake dirge, till every stone in the shadowy manor seemed to have a voice, and every voice was weeping for the dead lord. And many of the women fell upon their knees, and some of the men, too, while others drew up their hoods, and stood with bent heads and folded hands against the rough walls.

Slowly and solemnly they bore him in and set the bier down under the mid-arch. Then Gilbert Warde looked up and faced his mother; but he stood aside, that she might see her husband; and the monks and the song-boys stood back also, with their wax torches, which cast a dancing glare through the dim twilight. Gilbert's face was white and stern; but the Lady Goda was pale, too, and her heart fluttered, for she had to play the last act of her married life before many who would watch her narrowly. For one moment she hesitated whether to scream or to faint in honor of her dead husband. Then, with the instinct of the born and perfect actress, she looked wildly from her son's face to the straight, still length that lay beneath the pall. She raised one hand to her forehead, pressing back her golden hair with a gesture half mad, half dazed, then seemed to stagger forward two steps, and fell upon the body, in a storm of tears.

Gilbert went to the bier, and lifted one of his mother's gloved hands from the covered face, and it dropped from his fingers as if lifeless. He lifted the black cloth pall, and turned it back as far as he could without disturbing the woman's prostrate figure; and there lay the Lord of Stoke, in his mail, as he had fallen in fight, in his peaked steel helmet, the straight, fine ring-mail close-drawn round his face and chin, the silky brown mustache looking terribly alive against the dead face. But across the eyes and the forehead below the helmet there was laid a straight black band, and upon his breast the great mailed hands clasped the cross-hilted sword that lay lengthwise with his body. Gilbert, bareheaded and unarmed, gazed down into his father's face for a while, then suddenly looked up and spoke to all the people who thronged the gateway.



"Men of Stoke," he said, "here lies the body of Sir Raymond Warde, your liege lord, my father. He fell in the fight before Farrington Castle, and this is the third day since he was slain; for the way was long, and we were not suffered to pass unmolested. The castle was but half built, and we were encamped about it with the Earl of Gloucester, when the king came suddenly from Oxford with a great host; and they fell upon us unawares at early morning, when we had but just heard the mass, and most of us were but half armed, or not at all. So we fought as we could, and many fell, and not a few we killed with our hands. And I, with a helmet on my head and a gambeson but half buckled upon my body, and my hands bare, was fighting with a full-armed Frenchman, and was hard pressed. But I smote him in the neck, so that he fell upon one knee and reeled. And even that moment I saw this sight: A score of paces from me, my father and Sir Arnold de Curboil met face to face, suddenly and without warning, their swords lifted in the act to strike; but when my father saw his friend before him, he dropped his sword-arm, and smiled, and would have turned away to fight another; but Sir Arnold smiled also, and lowered not his hand, but smote my father by the point, unguarded, and thrust his sword through head and hood of mail at one stroke, treacherously. And so my father, your liege lord, fell dead unshriven, by his friend's hand; and may the curse of man, and the damnation of almighty God, be upon his murderer's head, now and after I shall have killed him! For, as I would have sprung forward, the Frenchman, who was but stunned, sprang to his feet and grappled with me; and by the time he had no breath left, and the light broke in his eyes, Sir Arnold was gone, and our fight was lost. So we made a truce to bury our dead, and brought them away, each his own."

When he had spoken there was silence for many moments, broken only by the Lady Goda's unceasing sobs. In the court within, and on the bridge without, the air grew purple and dark and misty; for the sun had long gone down, and the light from the wax torches, leaping, flaming, and flickering in the evening breeze, grew stronger and yellower under the gateway than the twilight without. The dark-robed monks looked gravely on, waiting till they should be told to pass into the chapel—men of all ages and looks, red and pale, thin and stout, dark and fair, but all having that something in their faces that marks the churchman from

century to century. Between them and the dead knight Gilbert stood still, with bent head and downcast eyes, with pale face and set lips, looking at his mother's bright hair and at her clutching hands, and listening to the painfully drawn breath, broken continually by her agonized weeping. Suddenly the bloodhounds' bay broke out again, fierce and deep; and on the instant a high young voice rang from the court through the deep arch:

"Burn the murderer! To Stortford, and burn him out!"

Gilbert looked up quickly, peering into the gloom whence the voice had spoken. He did not see how, at the words, his mother started back from the corpse, steadied herself with one hand, and fixed her eyes in the same direction; but before he could answer, the cry was taken up by a hundred throats:

"Burn the traitor! burn the murderer! To Stortford! Fagots! Fagots and pitch!"

High, low, hoarse, clear, the words followed one another in savage yells; and here and there among the rough men there were eyes that gleamed in the dark like a dog's.

Then through the din came a rattling of bolts and a creaking of hinges, as the grooms tore open the stable doors to bring out the horses and saddle them for the raid; and one called for a light, and another warned men from his horse's heels. The Lady Goda was on her feet, her hands stretched out imploringly to her son, instinctively and for the first time, as to the head of the house. She spoke to him, too; but he neither heard nor saw, for in his own heart a new horror had possession, beside which what had gone before was as nothing. He thought of Beatrix.

"Hold!" he cried. "Let no man stir, for no man shall pass out who would burn Stortford. Sir Arnold de Curboil is the king's man, and the king has the power in England; so that if we should burn down Stortford Castle to-night, he would burn Stoke Manor to-morrow over my mother's head. Between Arnold de Curboil and me there is death. To-morrow I shall ride out to find him, and kill him in fair fight. But let there be no raiding, no harrying, and no burning, as if we were Stephen's French robbers, or King David's red-haired Scots. Take up the bier; and you," he said, turning to the monks and songmen, "take up your chant, that we may lay him in the chapel and say prayers for his unshriven soul."

The Lady Goda's left hand had been pressed to her heart as though she were in fear and pain; but as her son spoke it fell by her side, and her face grew calm before she

remembered that it should grow sad. Until to-day her son had been in her eyes but a child, subject to his father, subject to herself, subject to the old manor priest who had taught him the little he knew. Now, on a sudden, he was full-grown and strong; more than that, he was master in his father's place, and at a word from him, reeve-men and men-at-arms and bondmen would have gone forth on the instant to slay the man she loved, and to burn and to harry all that was his. She was grateful to him for not having spoken that word; and since Gilbert meant to meet Curboil in single combat, she felt no fear for her lover, the most skilled man at fence in all Essex and Hertfordshire, and she felt sure, likewise, that for his reputation as a knight he would not kill a youth but half his age.

And while she was thinking of these things, the monks had begun to chant again; the confusion was ended in the courtyard; the squires took up the bier, and the procession moved slowly across the broad paved space to the chapel opposite the main gate.

An hour later Sir Raymond's dead body lay before the altar, whereon burned many waxen tapers. Alone, upon the lowest step, Gilbert was kneeling, with joined hands and uplifted eyes, as motionless as a statue. He had taken the long sword from the dead man's breast, and had set it up against the altar, straight and bare. It was hacked at the edges, and there were dark stains upon it from its master's last day's work. In the simple faith of a bloody age, Gilbert Warde was vowing, by all that he and his held sacred, before God's altar, upon God's sacred body, upon his father's unburied corpse, that before the blade should be polished again, it should be black with the blood of his father's murderer.

And as he knelt there, his lady mother, now clad all in black, entered the chapel, and moved slowly toward the altar-steps. She meant to kneel beside her son; but when she was yet three paces from him, a great terror at her own falseness descended into her heart, and she sank upon her knees in the aisle.

### III.

VERY early in the morning, Gilbert Warde was riding along the straight road between Sheering Abbey and Stortford Castle. He rode in his tunic and hose and russet boots, with his father's sword by his side; for he meant not to do murder, but to fight his enemy to death, in all the honor of even

chance. He judged that Sir Arnold must have returned from Farrington; and if Gilbert met him now, riding over his own lands in the May morning, he would be unmailed and unsuspecting of attack. And should they not meet, Gilbert meant to ride up to the castle gate, and ask for the baron, and courteously propose to him that they should ride together into the wood. And, indeed, Gilbert hoped that it might turn out so; for, once under the gateway, he might hope to see Beatrix for a moment; and two weeks had passed, and terrible things had happened, since he had last set eyes upon her face.

He met no one in the road; but in the meadow before the castle, half a dozen Saxon grooms, in loose hose and short homespun tunics, were exercising some of Curboil's great Normandy horses. The baron himself was not in sight, and the grooms told Gilbert that he was within. The drawbridge was down, and Gilbert halted just before entering the gate, calling loudly for the porter. But instead of the latter, Sir Arnold himself appeared at that moment within the courtyard, feeding a brace of huge mastiffs with gobbets of red raw meat from a wooden bowl, carried by a bare-legged stable-boy with a shock of almost colorless flaxen hair, and a round, red face, pierced by two little round blue eyes. Gilbert called again, and the knight instantly turned and came toward him, beating down with his hands the huge dogs that sprang up at him in play and seemed trying to drive him back. Sir Arnold was smooth, spotless, and as carefully dressed as ever, and came forward with a well-composed smile in which hospitality was skilfully blended with sympathy and concern. Gilbert, who was as thorough a Norman in every instinct and thought as any whose fathers had held lands from the Conqueror, did his best to be suave and courteous on his side. Dismounting, he said quietly that he desired to speak with Sir Arnold alone upon a matter of weight, and, as the day was fair, he proposed that they should ride together for a little way into the greenwood. Sir Arnold barely showed a slight surprise, and readily assented. Gilbert, intent upon his purpose, noticed that the knight had no weapon.

"It were as well that you took your sword with you, Sir Arnold," he said, somewhat emphatically. "No one is safe from highwaymen in these times."

The knight met Gilbert's eyes, and the two looked at each other steadily for a moment; then Curboil sent the stable-boy to

fetch his sword from the hall, and himself went out upon the drawbridge, and called to one of the grooms to bring in a horse. In less than half an hour from the time when Gilbert had reached the castle, he and his enemy were riding quietly side by side in a little glade in Stortford wood. Gilbert drew rein and walked his horse, and Sir Arnold instantly did the same. Then Gilbert spoke:

"Sir Arnold de Curboil, it is now full three days since I saw you treacherously kill my father."

Sir Arnold started and turned half round in the saddle, his olive skin suddenly white with anger; but the soft, fresh color in Gilbert's cheek never changed.

"Treacherously!" cried the knight, angrily and with a questioning tone.

"Fouly," answered Gilbert, with perfect calm. "I was not twenty paces from you when you met, and had I not been hampered by a Frenchman of your side, who was unreasonably slow in dying, I should have either saved my father's life, or ended yours, as I mean to now."

Thereupon Gilbert brought his horse to a stand, and prepared to dismount; for the sward was smooth and hard, and there was room enough to fight. Sir Arnold laughed aloud, as he sat still in the saddle watching the younger man.

"So you have brought me here to kill me!" he said, as his mirth subsided.

Gilbert's foot was already on the ground, but he paused in the act of dismounting.

"If you do not like the spot," he answered coolly, "we can ride farther."

"No; I am satisfied," answered the knight; but before he had spoken the last word he broke into a laugh again.

They tied up their horses, out of reach of one another, to trees at a little distance, and Gilbert was the first to return to the ring of open ground. As he walked, he drew his father's sword from its sheath, slipped the scabbard from the belt and threw it to the edge of the grass. Sir Arnold was before him a moment later; but his left hand only rested on theommel of his sheathed weapon, and he was still smiling as he stopped before his young adversary.

"I should by no means object to fighting you," he said, "if I had killed your father in treachery. But I did not. I saw you as well as you saw me. Your Frenchman, as you call him, hindered your sight. Your father was either beside himself with rage, or did not know me in my mail. He dropped his point one instant, and then flew at me like a

bloodhound, so that I barely saved myself by slaying him against my will. I will not fight you unless you force me to it; and you had better not, for if you do, I shall lay you by the heels in two passes."

"Bragging and lying are well coupled," answered Gilbert, falling into guard. "Draw before I shall have counted three, or I will skewer you like a trussed fowl. One—two—"

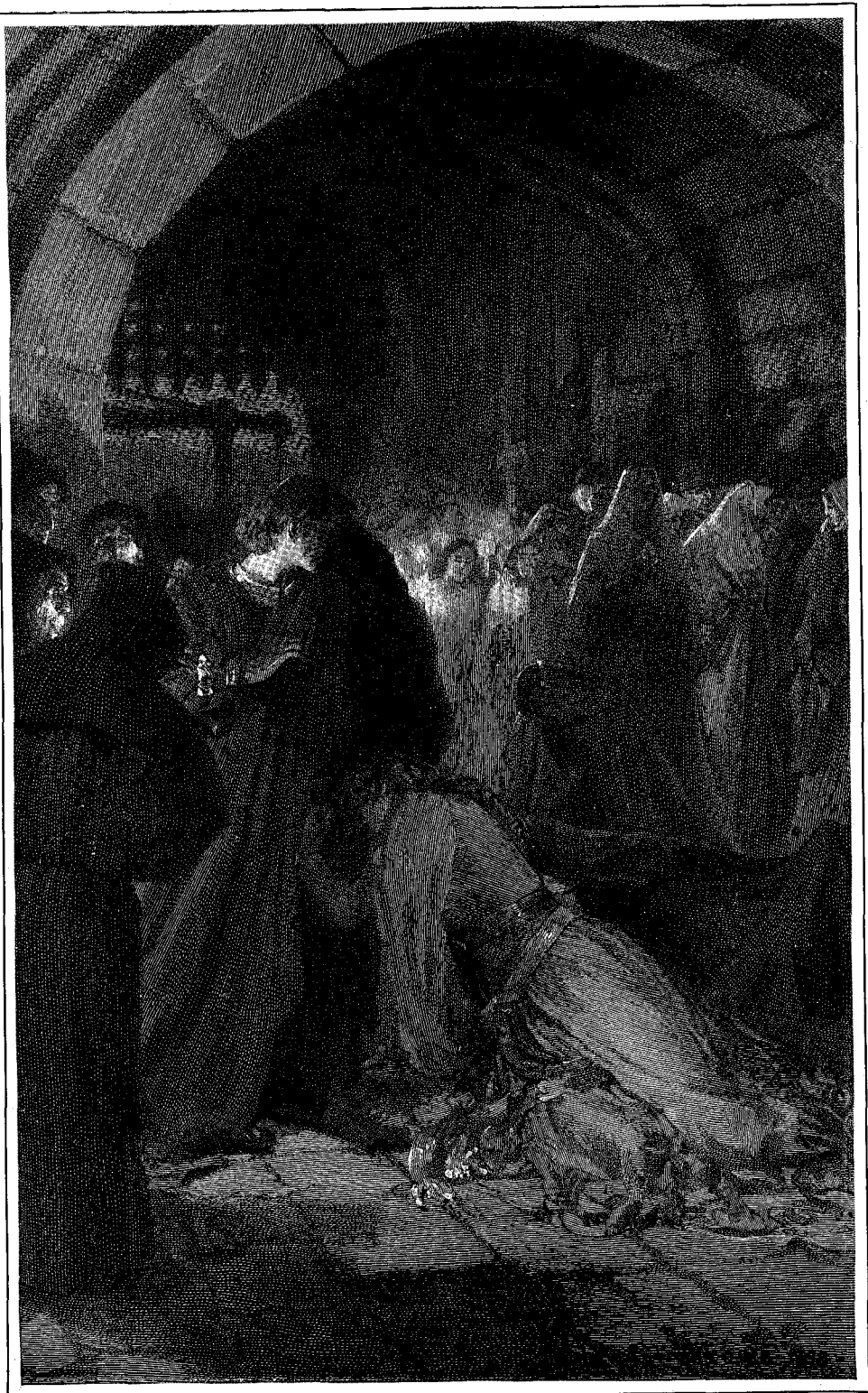
Before the next word could pass his lips, Sir Arnold's sword was out, keen and bright as if it had just left the armorer's hands, clashing upon Gilbert's hacked and blood-rusted blade.

Sir Arnold was a brave man, but he was also cautious. He expected to find in Gilbert a beginner of small skill and reckless bravery, who would expose himself for the sake of bringing in a sweeping blow in *carte*, or attempting a desperate thrust. Consequently he did not attempt to put his bragging threat into practice, for Gilbert was taller than he, stronger, and more than twenty years younger. Unmailed, as he stood in his tunic and hose, one vigorous sword-stroke of the furious boy might break down his guard and cut him half in two. But in one respect Curboil was mistaken. Gilbert, though young, was one of those naturally gifted fencers in whom the movements of wrist and arm are absolutely simultaneous with the perception of the eye, and not divided by any act of reasoning or thought. In less than half a minute Sir Arnold knew that he was fighting for his life; the full minute had not passed before he felt Gilbert's jagged blade deep in the big muscles of his sword-arm, and his own weapon, running past his adversary, fell from his powerless hand.

In those days it was no shame to strike a disarmed foe in a duel to the death. As Sir Arnold felt the rough steel wrenched from the flesh-wound, he knew that the next stroke would be his end. Quick as light, his left hand snatched his long dagger from its sheath at his left side, and even as Gilbert raised his blade to strike, he felt as if an icicle had pierced his throat; his arm trembled in the air, and lost its hold upon the hilt; a scarlet veil descended before his eyes, and the bright blood gushed from his mouth, as he fell straight backward upon the green turf.

Sir Arnold stepped back, and stood looking at the fallen figure curiously, drawing his lids down, as some short-sighted men do. Then, as the sobbing breast ceased to heave and the white hands lay quite still





DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

"SHE . . . FELL UPON THE BODY, IN A STORM OF TEARS."

VOL. LVII.—10.



upon the sword, he shrugged his shoulders, and began to take care of his own wound by twisting a leathern thong from Gilbert's saddle very tight upon his upper arm, using a stout oak twig for a lever. Then he plucked a handful of grass with his left hand, and tried to hold his dagger in his right, in order to clean the reddened steel. But his right hand was useless, so he knelt

on one knee beside the body, and ran the poniard two or three times through the skirt of Gilbert's dark tunic, and returned it to its sheath. He picked up his sword, too, and succeeded in sheathing it. He mounted his horse, leaving Gilbert's tethered to the tree, cast one more glance at the motionless figure on the grass, and rode away toward Stortford Castle.

(To be continued.)

## PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF THE "MAINE."

BY HER COMMANDER, CAPTAIN CHARLES DWIGHT SIGSBEE, U. S. N.

### FIRST PAPER.

#### I. OUR RECEPTION AT HAVANA.

THE explosion of the *Maine* at Havana, on February 15, 1898, was the ultimate incident which impelled the people of the United States to regard Spain as an impossible neighbor. Although the war which followed was not founded on the destruction of the *Maine* as a political cause, that disaster was the pivotal event of the conflict which has terminated Spanish possession in the Western World. Considerations like these must continue to give the *Maine* a unique place in the history of the United States, especially since the character and magnitude of the disaster make it one of the most shocking on record.

The story of the *Maine* leading up to the explosion may be said to begin at the Southern drill-ground of the North Atlantic Squadron, as far back as October 9, 1897. The *New York*, *Iowa*, *Brooklyn*, *Massachusetts*, *Indiana*, *Texas*, and *Maine*—all now historic—had been on a cruise along the New England coast, ending at Bar Harbor on August 31. From Bar Harbor they proceeded in squadron to the Southern drill-ground, about twenty-five miles to the eastward of Cape Charles, a locality set apart for drills by reason of its comparative remoteness from the common commercial route of coasting-vessels, as well as its convenient depth of water for anchorage. The squadron was under the command of Rear-Admiral Montgomery Sicard. The night of October 8 terminated a period of hard work of the kind which brought overwhelming victory later. Part of the time had been spent at Hampton Roads in recoaling, and at York-

town in sham-fighting on shore, and in small-arms target practice. The days at sea had been spent in squadron evolutions, target practice, and signaling, and the nights, at least in part, in night-signaling, search-light drill, and in secondary-battery practice, simulating the conditions of attack by torpedo-boats. It was not mere routine; it was the business of warfare, pursued with stern official conscience, under a commander-in-chief who throughout his whole career had been conspicuous for official conscience.

On the night of October 8, the squadron was at the Southern drill-ground awaiting the arrival of the *Brooklyn*, which had gone to Hampton Roads for minor repairs. It was expected that the whole squadron would get under way for Boston that night. We of the *Maine* were wondering at the delay of the *Brooklyn*, when, toward midnight, the torpedo-boats *Porter* and *Ericsson* joined the squadron from Hampton Roads, with despatches for the commander-in-chief. As a result of these despatches, the *Indiana* (Captain H. C. Taylor) was detached and sent to Hampton Roads, and the *Maine*, my command, to Port Royal, South Carolina. The *Indiana* got away during the night, but the *Maine* was repairing some injury, and did not part company with the squadron until dawn of the following day. Thus began a virtually unbroken tour of independent service for the *Maine*, which was connected more or less intimately with the disturbed condition of affairs in Cuba, and culminated in the explosion at Havana.

The *Maine* arrived in Port Royal Sound on October 12. The next day she was taken up the river, and moored in a hole just large