

SKETCHES OF EAST-FLORIDA.

NUMBER ONE.

'OFFICER OF THE NIGHT.'

I HAVE few antipathies, but there are some that I do battle with at sight or smell. Whether persons or things, I *appreciate* them at once; as some persons of keen perceptions will tell immediately when a cat is near them. You will hear people talk of what they call a 'presentiment of evil.' This is all humbug. If they would look about them, they would find, each one, his respective cat; or, to speak magnetically, his 'opposite pole.'

Corporal F—— was my antipathy, my 'opposite pole,' my cat; and for that matter, a *Tom-cat*, and a very saucy one. We had never spoken, and knew nothing of each other; our eyes had never met, but we had stolen glances, each way, giving strong confirmation of what the mere presence of each sufficiently indicated; to wit, a decided hostility. I had felt uncomfortable some mornings before, and knew perfectly well that I had a cat to find; but I did *not* know, till afterward, that Corporal F—— had reached town that very day. It was a common fancy with me, subsequently, that I knew what part of the town he was in at any given time; and this may have been fancy only, or it may have been a fact magnectical.

Our first meeting was in ——, East Florida. I had been in that warm-bath of a climate just long enough to get well soaked through, and was beginning to act out that dreamy languor of body and soul that fits one so exactly for the cigar-life — the lounging, easy nonchalance of that sunny land; in short, without that excess of high spirits which is an irritation, I was superlatively happy — till I met Corporal F——. He was to me immediately a large spot on the sun; and although I could n't always *see* the spot, I knew it was there, and keeping off so much sunshine. His arrival, as I viewed it, was impertinent, and not at all in aid of the object I had in coming a thousand miles to that delicious climate. With a generous ingenuity, I thought at first of proposing to him to draw cuts, to decide which of us should leave town. He had not the look of being cared for, and I could not imagine his absence would be missed at all, except by me; while as to myself, to say nothing of the party I was with, I rather thought that the girls who had taken so much pains to teach me their waltzes and Spanish dances —— But that's no matter. The risk to me would be an unrighteous one, and the project was abandoned.

We were a party of half a dozen, who had left New-York as the severe winter of '35 and '36 was setting in, and reached —— by way of Picolata, making the last safe passage over that road. The

Indian war had just broken out, and the whole country was in arms. Shortly after our arrival, the north part of the town was picketed off at about half a mile from the outskirts, with a guard, here and there; and a cordon of military posts stretched along the western side, around to the sea. A large gun was then placed in the middle of H——'s bridge, pointing into the pine barrens; the usual night patrol of southern cities was doubled, and the place declared under 'martial law.' Every able-bodied man was expected to do service; and if that expectation failed to be met by any one, that 'individual' was assisted by a corporal and guard. I was an 'able-bodied man;' sound in every particular. The hot sun had already browned my face so that there were no delicate indices of ill health; and if I had been a shade darker, I might have been knocked off at the market for at least seven hundred dollars. I was full of '*tusymusy*,' and ready for any thing, but wished to be myself the master of the 'how and when' of any enterprise that I was to engage in.

I was anticipated. Happening to criticise the appearance of the different companies about town, in too public a manner, the sovereigns were offended, and it was resolved that I should be victimized. I was ordered to appear at the Fort, armed and equipped for immediate service, as one of a small guard of Minorcans and Spaniards, posted a mile and a half out of town; of which guard, Bravo was corporal, and —— captain; precisely as I should like to have put them in a shipping-bill for the East-Indies. Well, I declined the invitation. I was from the 'mountain-land,' and for some days, my blood had been going up with the thermometer, at the strange goings-on about town. There appeared to me a quite unnecessary preparation of powder for mere home consumption. Beside, what did I know about war, that they should select me, when the streets were full of Uncle Sam's men, and hardly room enough for them at the outskirts to spread their tents? I did *not* call at the Fort. I did n't even send my card, or my regret. Of course I was not surprised the next morning, at parade hours, to see Corporal Bravo and guard coming down the street with apparently hostile intentions. It might be accident that they approached so near the house; but people in that climate never move without an object; and I accordingly passed through a gate in the rear, merely to air myself in a different direction. Bravo enquired for me very particularly at the house, breathed a few moments his men, who were in a high excitement; made a rapid revolution, and marched back to the Fort, a mile distant, to report that I was not to be found. At afternoon parade, the same military movement was repeated, and I had again the same charming view of the H—— turkey-buzzards and small snipes on the beach, with fiddlers innumerable, and in the back-ground the pine woods of the wilderness.

After a few days, I was trapped by mere civility; a very *forcible* thing, by the way, as all women know very well, but there are men who never can learn it. A polite note came from the captain, asking me to call at his quarters; and I was very soon ushered into a room that was lined with muskets and swords and men to use them. The

captain received me pleasantly, complimenting me upon my 'esprit du corps' in being master of my own company, etc; but I saw the game at once; and bursting into a laugh at the savage looks of the guard, surrendered at once, merely asking the courtesies of a prisoner of war. I was immediately gratified — with three muskets, one for myself, the others to protect me on either wing, carried by friends who insisted on an arm each side; and so with a strong support in the rear by the rest of the guard, and Bravo in front, cutting the way with a drawn sword, we marched to the Fort. When we entered the walls, and came in sight of the commandant, I expected to be 'cut in sunder at the waist,' but was merely noticed with a careless severity, and told to look on, and be ready at the next parade. We then assumed the form of a rhomboid, in which I was at equal distances from the respective angles, and marched a mile and a half to the camp. After showing me 'the fortifications,' which consisted of a pine-board enclosure of about ten feet by twelve, I was taken into the hot sun to be drilled privately. This was a very short operation. I handled the musket with a kind of desperation, which very soon convinced the corporal that I had the 'real stuff' in me; especially in my last manœuvre, which consisted in cocking the piece suddenly, and lowering the muzzle to his breast; upon which, with military abruptness, he declared the drill over, and myself perfectly *au fait* at all military operations.

I was now instructed in other arts and mysteries of war; and was told, among other things, that an officer from town generally visited each camp during the night, and that then every man was to be belted and ready for inspection. When the sentry received, in answer to his challenge, '*Officer of the Night*,' his duty was to cry out, for timely notice at the camp: '*Corporal of the Guard — Grand Rounds — Officer of the Night*.' This, in Bravo's opinion, was the grandest of all military affairs that were executed without waste of powder. The officer of the night had not been round, for a week, but he was always to be expected. Bravo and myself were very soon on excellent terms. I rather liked him, in spite of the burlesque of his name; for as such men generally do, he had contrived to assume something so like his translation, that it passed very well for the real article. If he did not fulfill his full meaning, his efforts were at least well-meant, and he had a saucy good humor that was quite companionable. That night we had two sentries out, stationed some hundred yards each side of the camp; and somewhere about the 'small hours' I took my first 'stand at arms' on the northern pass, and challenging noises all night, without reply, acquitted myself very much to the corporal's satisfaction. A few days passed very pleasantly away, and I was enjoying my military life so much that I had entirely forgotten Corporal F——. It should be premised, that I knew nothing of his being a corporal, and cared as little. I had no objection to his being a perfect Nabob, if he would only keep out of my way. I now learned that he had command of the next post north of us, and only about half a mile distant.

One charming morning, after an 'off night,' when I was allowed

to stay in town, I sallied into the street, *en route* to the parade-ground, humming to myself in mocking-bird style, my belt snug and faultlessly white, and musket leaning with an off-duty obliquity that was not pardonable merely, but quite the thing, when I suddenly *felt* that Corporal F—— was in the street! He was not to be seen, but I knew perfectly well that he was standing in a shop-door, only a short distance ahead. The streets in that old town are very narrow, so that on meeting a cart, the safest way is to post yourself flatwise against the wall, and admire the prospect in the opposite direction till the cart is cleverly by. Of course the foot-paths, such as they are, are close to the wall, and give no room for steps to houses, where, as in most cases, they are built directly on the street. I was on the same side with Corporal F——. If in passing, the corporal should attempt the street, there would be a collision. These mathematical problems suggested that I could cross over, as it was only a long straddle, but I had no desire to do so. Almost unconsciously, however, my musket went to the perpendicular, my eyes fixed where I thought the north star ought to be, (magnetic coincidence!) and my marching-foot was coming down with extra emphasis, at a point just abreast of him, when I thought — it might be imagination — but I thought his foot moved out slightly from the threshold. Quick as the thought, which was lightning in my then state of the brain, I wheeled, brought my musket with a ring upon the lime-stone, and looked Corporal F—— dead in the face! He returned the look with less interest than I expected, but he didn't waver a hair, and our eyes fixed upon each other as steadily as though we had been playing at small-swords. There was barely breathing room between us; and at one time his lips moved as about to speak, but he said nothing. Of course, I had nothing to say, but if *he* had any explanation to make, I was then ready to hear it; and if not — I was going on in this manner to myself, when it occurred to me that he was unarmed, and I had a musket, with a tremendous bore, (especially a great bore of a hot day) and a ball then in it, that I would not have dared to have sent within three points of the most distant vessel in the offing. Without taking my eye from him, I resumed my up-street facing; the accenting foot forward, musket to shoulder, and immediately marched up street.

If Bravo had seen this evolution, and my march up the street, how smoothly he would have rolled out his Spanish braggadocia upon my military training! As I passed under balconies loaded down with gay girls, fingers may have been kissed at me; quite likely; I never knew, for I went 'right on' with set teeth to the Fort.

And now, would Corporal F—— challenge? I certainly had given him a chance, and I was in a perfect fever to bring matters to a crisis. I am not a fighting man. I never eat veal, or any thing that's killed young; preferring to wait till I am convinced that from wet days and cold winters the beast must have become indifferent to a knock on the head: but who could refuse his antipathy? Who could live in the same air with his tom-cat?

The day passed — and I was not challenged.

That night, as we lay about the camp-fire, I was possessed of a sudden inspiration, and immediately gave a loud shout. Bravo looked up enquiringly, and Boag, who was privy to my antipathy, sprang to his feet, ready for any emergency. Boag knew that something was in the wind. I paid no attention to either of them, but called up Tom, my errand-boy, and gave him the requisites, with a pass, for a gallon of Santa Cruz, sugar, etc; and all the eggs he could find in town, and then despatched a few men with a boat, for a load of oysters.

Boag was the only other American in our camp. He happened in Florida, in what manner I don't know, from Charleston, South-Carolina, and fell an easy victim, having been captured before I had that pleasure. He was the happiest man I ever knew; happy in every thing he undertook, and careful not to undertake too much. His sagacity upon that point alone would have made a character of any ordinary man. The mere motion of the man seemed to be a high enjoyment, and his bowling at nine-pins was the very perfection of carelessness. He was never guilty of a 'spare,' and would have shuddered at the nicety and precision of hitting any particular pin. But Boag's highest happiness, literally and technically, was in his composition of egg-nogg. Egg-nogg from Boag was irresistible; a smooth, and chaste production: the white of a pullet's egg, deliciously flavored, was all you could think of, until — some time after taking it.

About nine o'clock, the roast and 'nogg were ready; and then, as we grouped about the fire you should have looked in upon us, to have seen happy faces. The Spaniards in a perfect sputter of talk and gesticulation as though every oyster burnt to the stomach; Boag presiding every where with his stick; and myself, the Mephistophiles of the occasion, lying on a board, the windward side of the group, taking just enough of the 'nogg to digest each particular oyster, and no more. Toward midnight, they had worried themselves sleepy, and crept off to their berths, Bravo bringing up the rear, and laying himself out in a very grand manner, his legs and arms indicating all points of the compass, to signify, I suppose, that he ruled in all directions. After waiting a suitable time for the sentries to become careless, I beckoned to Boag, whose intuition was as perfect as a woman's, and he followed me stealthily into the long salt grass bordering the beach. The sentries were ordered to fire immediately upon any one who refused to answer their challenge; and knowing that the sentry we had to pass was only half-drunk, I had a painful apprehension that the egg-nogg was after all a questionable forethought. We had gained but a short distance, when the quick challenge sent us headlong in the grass. The sentry could n't leave his post, and probably concluded that some wild fowl had risen between him and the sky, and settled down again. Emerging again, at about the same distance on the other side of the sentry, we were again challenged, and made our salaam, as before, in the same unhesitating manner. Presently the challenge was repeated, and we thought we heard the click of his musket. The night was painfully

still, and it might be the sharp cry of a disturbed snipe, or the snapping of a brand at the camp-fire. We were breathless 'for a space,' and the musketoos seemed to know perfectly well that we durst not raise a finger to brush them off. Then creeping along till we were sure of being within the shade of the forest, we came to the perpendicular again, and walked on rapidly to the camp of Corporal F—. I hinted to Boag to keep calm, and ready for any thing that might turn up; at which he looked amazed, but said nothing; no doubt wondering that I had not yet learned to appreciate him. At this moment, we received an abrupt challenge from the advanced guard of Corporal F—. I shouted back, with all the strength of egg-nogg, the magic words, '*Officer of the Night!*' And oh! what a relief to that sentry, as he made the pine woods ring with '*Corporal of the Guard — Grand Rounds — Officer of the Night!*'

Turkey-buzzards flew about on the tree-tops, and the whole family of wild fowl, coughed and wheezed out their disturbance upon the still night. Then arose the hum of the camp. A dozen sleepy Spaniards sprang from their berths, swearing vociferously; lights waved, swords clattered to the hip, and down came Corporal F—, with his men superbly belted, their heads leaning back to the north star, and muskets flashing in the torch-light of three negroes coming on before.

At a short distance from us, Corporal F— gave a tremendous '*Halt!*' upon which, I made two steps forward, and waving off the little niggers to the right and left, stood in bold relief — the Officer of the Night.

'Well, of course Corporal F— drew his sword, and 'cut you in sunder at the waist?'

Not at all; but if that column of men, together with Corporal F—, had immediately fallen over backward, I could not have been better satisfied of their astonishment. The short silence was so terrible to Boag, that feeling he must say something, he suggested a want of candles, in a feeble way; and then, with a hurried '*Right about face — march!*' the Corporal and guard vanished in the darkness.

Reader, I am sorry to hoax you, but there was no catastrophe. An antipathy looked dead in the face is always *pointless*. I was not challenged by Corporal F—; and as corporal, I never saw him after that night. I never knew his name; and it is quite probable that five years afterward I passed my wine to him in that same old antiquated town. There was a face at our hotel that reminded me very much of Corporal F—; but with five years, my antipathy had gone, and my tom-cat was a very clever companion.

EPICRAM OF PLATO TO A DECEASED FRIEND.

As once thou shon'st, a morning star,
With life's young glory round thy head,
So now thou deck'st the western sky,
Soft gleaming from among the dead.

W. H. H.

A U T U M N .

ON woodland and on mountain side
 Rich, varied tints appear ;
 By mossy stone and wandering wave
 Pale leaves are falling sere ;
 The garden flowers all scattered lie,
 In sorrowful decay,
 And the greenness of the valley slope
 Is fading fast away !

And are the verdure and the bloom
 In their fresh prime so dear,
 That thus the spirit mourneth o'er
 The ruin of the year ?
 No ! 'tis because true types are they
 Of lovelier, dearer things ;
 Hopes, joys, and transports, unto which
 The soul so fondly clings.

There is a moral in each leaf
 That droppeth from the tree ;
 In each lone, barren bough that points
 To heaven so mournfully :
 Mute Nature, in her silent way,
 A mystic lesson tells,
 And they who watch the Sybil well
 May profit by her spells.

Richmond, Virginia.

Bon-Rosmi.

F I O R E L L O ' S F I D D L E - S T I C K .

BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR.

Among the men of rank in London, who were distinguished during the last century for their love of music, the Baron Baygo held a prominent place. This worthy man found music in every thing. Did a door creak upon its hinges, did a chair make a shrill sound in gliding over the floor, presto ! in an instant our melomaniac seizes his tablets and marks down the corresponding musical inflections. There was not, in short, an itinerant merchant of the streets of London whose favorite cry had not been reproduced in the collection of Baron Baygo. To speak truth, however, it must be confessed that the musical education of our Baron had not been of the most thorough character, being rather superficial than solid. He was consequently obliged to have recourse to an amanuensis to note down for him, in a proper and artist-like manner, all the noises, good, bad, or indifferent, which figured in his musical *agenda*.

To procure a person of sufficient tact and patience to understand and humor all the Baron's whims, it may readily be imagined was no easy task. Having changed a score of times his musical secre-