

THE MAJOR'S SILHOUETTE.

By Wardon Allan Curtis.

THERE was a touch of approaching winter in the air. The persimmons had begun to glow on the leafless branches, and the mild yellow of the papaw showed in the bushes along the creeks. The last hazel nuts had been gathered by the negro children, and at night the southward flying wild ducks settled in the marsh. The weather was pleasant and invigorating, and the slight tonic cold in the air stirred the old blood of Major Gascoigne and made him feel young again as he rode forth for his daily constitutional.

He was late in starting this day. The dust clouds, glorified with the rays of the declining sun, burned on the summits of the little western hills, and the shadows of the great elms and oaks were creeping far across the fields. The major sat his horse firmly, for no one had a firmer seat than he, and rode straight into the west until he reached the highest point of land in the township, where he halted his horse and gazed over the kindly landscape. All the surrounding country, as far as his eye could reach, had once belonged to the Gascoignes, and the country people, black and white, had not forgotten this, though the Gascoigne estate had shrunk from thousands of acres to hundreds. The major was a person of consequence, and represented the district in the Legislature whenever he chose. He was a man of character. He carried himself erect, and had told but one lie in his life.

Across the Blackwater, flowing at the foot of the hill, was a cluster of negro cabins, the "quarters" of an old plantation whose manor house had been burned during the war and had never been rebuilt. There was an unusual bustle about the cabins. The largest one of all was rudely decorated with evergreens and strips of bright colored cloth hanging in ungainly festoons from its low eaves. Fiddles were squeaking gaily, and smoke poured forth from the chimney of the great out door oven that stood in the center of the group of cabins, a relic of plantation days.

The major recalled that he had heard, or had read in the weekly paper, that there

was to be a wedding there that night—a notable wedding, too, for the groom was possessed of a good hundred acres of land, and the bride was a handsome quadroon. The major remembered the groom's mother, Chloe, when she was a comely young servant in his father's house before the war, and he was a young man, a year or two younger than Chloe, perhaps. He knew her son, too, by sight, and he sometimes saw him at a distance, but never face to face; for the major avoided the poor colored man, though he did not acknowledge it, even to himself. The son must be thirty or thirty five now, and he had never married—queer for a nigger, thought the major.

He fell to wondering about this son, how he looked, what sort of a fellow he was, when there was a slight sound at the edge of the road and he beheld the man he was thinking of, standing in the osage orange hedge with a sharp, heavy hedging scythe in his hands.

"Ah, good evening," said the major, startled, and the negro silently bowed an acknowledgment of the salute.

The major was strangely embarrassed. He had never spoken to the man before. He had not been so near to him for thirty years or more. He would gladly have turned his horse about and galloped homeward; but this would have been undignified, and he could not be undignified, even before a nigger.

"You are to be married tonight, I hear." The major spoke calmly and patronizingly, though his heart beat rapidly—more rapidly than it did in the charge at Shiloh; but he was a young man then, and he never had feared death.

"Yes. Shall you be present?" said the negro with cool offensiveness.

"Sir?" exclaimed the major, but not with that indignation which the situation demanded, and which he tried to force into his tones. "Your impudence, sir, is amazing."

"Why not?" said the colored man. "I believe that it is customary for the next of kin to be present on such occasions."

"Do you dare take me to task for a past fault?" cried the major angrily, but he did not sit quite so erect in the saddle as he had before he had met the colored man. "It was only an escapade of youth. Your mother led me into it."

"Perhaps," said the colored man coolly, "yet was it not for you to resist?—for you, the master, the being of a higher race, to withstand the temptations of the poor, ignorant slave? Did you not owe a duty to your family, your race, to me, to whom you have given the curse of a white intellect in the prison of a black body? Did not the dastardly villainy of your deed ever occur to you, the terrible disgrace? And you try to shift the responsibility upon the black woman. Coward!"

The major, wondering at the negro's English, remembered that he had graduated at some confounded nigger institute or other. He noticed for the first time, too, that the black man had Caucasian features, with nothing of the negro about them—a regular Gascoigne face, in fact; and he shuddered as he wondered if any one else had ever noticed it. By a common freak of heredity, the negro had inherited his features from the white race, his color from the black.

"You ought to be proud because you have so much white blood and are so much smarter than the other colored men."

"Are you proud of me?" asked the colored man. "I would rather be a pure negro, with too little intelligence to aspire to anything better than the position into which the whites forced me, too brutish to care for anything but food, sleep, and shelter. As it is, I am a white man with a black skin, and there are thousands and thousands like me. We are separated from our fathers by a gulf as impassable as that between heaven and hell. It is a disgrace to possess one drop of negro blood, but to be the father of negro children is nothing."

The lines deepened in the major's face. He thought of the disgrace which was not a disgrace in the perverted moral code of the social fabric to which he belonged, and was therefore all the more truly a disgrace—the disgrace of cowardice. The black women and children had no redress. The laws of illegitimacy did not extend protection to them. The white sinner was always safe from disagreeable consequences.

"Are you coming to the wedding? I should like to see you there. I wish to pull you down. It will destroy your social position, of course. As a man who associates

with niggers, going to their festivities and weddings, you cannot hope to go to the Legislature again. If you do not come, I shall tell your daughters. The knowledge that you are not the pure and noble man they think you would break their hearts."

"It would," said the major bitterly.

"That is why I have not yet taken such a revenge. I would not have them suffer."

The major meditated. There were many proud men of his acquaintance who, having colored children, did not deny the fact among their friends; but none of them would stoop so low as to go to a nigger wedding. If he went to the wedding, his friends would despise him. If he did not go, his motherless daughters would know, and he wished to be thought good and true by them. He never boasted to them of his life stained by but a single lie, yet how often did they speak of it! He always felt their trusting eyes looking into his soul. He said little of chivalry, and honor, and the characteristics of conventional gentlemen, but his later years had been a constant effort to be what his daughters thought him. Some echoes of the evil morals that curse the lands where slavery has dragged its slimy trail had reached their pure ears, but their father was to them all that was noble and good.

His daughters must not know. Rather let him die enshrined as a saint in their minds than live and have them know. He would go to the wedding. But his presence there would injure the social standing of his family as well as of himself. He would compromise with the negro. He would pay him a large sum of money.

All the time that the major was thinking of these things, a light phaeton containing two girls was coming noiselessly up the hill. The black man saw it, and imagined that the major did also.

"Well," said the negro, "are you coming to the wedding?"

"No," said the major.

Before he could say another word, the black man shouted, "Behold your brother! That is your father and mine!"

"Is it true, father?" asked a piteous voice from the phaeton.

The major answered not. His strength was gone from him. He sat weak and nerveless in the saddle, gazing at the defiant man before him. Red and lusterless, a third of the sun still hung above the hill top; and black against its dull coppery glare were the profiles of the two men.

"It is true," shrieked the voice, and the phaeton turned around. The agonized

weepings, growing fainter in the distance, told the major that his image had fallen in the temple of his daughters' ideals.

"You hound!" he cried, as he spurred his horse upon the man before him.

Supper had waited upon the table for hours when the hoof beats of the major's horse sounded in the driveway at the Gascoigne house. The heir of the family rushed hastily out, seeking to learn the cause of this strange delay, and perhaps the cause of his sisters' tears.

There was no one upon the horse. The saddle was wet with something moist and sticky, and in the lantern light it was red. Quickly the household was aroused, and away they hastened to the place where the frightened girls had last seen their father.

They found him lying by the roadside, looking up to the stars with unseeing eyes, a bloody hedging scythe beside him. Across the Blackwater the wedding festivities were at their height, and the fiddles squeaked gaily.



BALLADE OF CHIVALRY.

THE mace, the gauntlet, and the keen, bright lance
Are only relics of the days that were;
And Rosinante in a mild way grants
That oats are sumptuous equinal fare.
Blithe Robin Hood has lost his whilom care
Of mesdames lorn and men in poor estate,
And fewer grow the knightly ones who dare
Young Raleigh's quick conceit to emulate.

Today, in lieu of those old, true gallants,
Are modish swains through monocles that stare;
Whose best exploit is deftness in the dance,
To close a draughty door, to place a chair,
To lift a handkerchief, to bravely bear
Through stifling crush an ice upon a plate—
These are the petty offices we share
Young Raleigh's quick conceit to emulate.

Who of these years can weave a wild romance
When knights are not, and squires serve elsewhere?
When most distracted maids are débutantes,
Each frowning battlement a rose parterre,
Moats tennis courts, and castles all of air—
The only tourneys that we celebrate
In drawing rooms,—the lists where we repair
Young Raleigh's quick conceit to emulate.

Prince, read your ladye not from vellums rare
The thrilling tales our age that antedate,
Lest she may mourn *we* have no time to spare
Young Raleigh's quick conceit to emulate.

Edward W. Barnard.