

LIFE.

Life is too short for any vain regretting; Let dead delight bury its dead, I say, And let us go on upon our way, forgetting The joys and sorrows of each yest'ery day. Between the swift sun's rising and its setting We have no time for useless tears or fretting; Life is too short.

MARIE'S MISSION.



NE bright morning in the first week of March, 1862, Marie Latour, a girl of sixteen, was standing before the Provost Marshal of Rattleville. She desired a pass, good for fifteen days, to cross the Mississippi River and return. "Have you taken the oath?" asked the officer, turning his full-bearded face and keen gray eyes upon the timid applicant. "I have not, monsieur," was the lowspoken response. Marie was an Americanized Creole, who spoke French and English with equal fluency. "Then you are willing to take it now?" decisively. "No, monsieur. That is, I—I have reasons for not—"

Here speech failed her, and she glanced appealingly at her martial interlocutor. "You must know, surely, that without taking the oath you cannot pass out of the lines," said he, coolly.

She was painfully aware of that inflexible military law, but how could she bind herself "to give no aid or comfort" to her own brother, who, at that very moment, was lying in a spualid swamp shanty, suffering, if not dying, for want of food and care? She was still mourning—in heart as well as in attire—for two brothers sleeping in soldiers' graves. To save this only remaining one, should she perjure herself? or, for truth's sake, must she renounce her mission, and leave him to slow starvation and the bitter agony of feeling himself forsaken? Then, too, her gentle invalid mother, whose heart was breaking for her boy! Heaven help the distracted girl! What should she do?

She stood with hands tightly clasped, looking down, for a few seconds. Then, with her clear brown eyes meeting the keen gray ones, she said, "Monsieur, if I could break it, I would take it." "Be as good as to explain yourself," was the sharp rejoinder. "I mean that if my conscience would let me violate a solemn oath, I would not mind taking that one," she answered, gently. "I would not, could not, refuse to relieve the suffering," she

filling, "whether your enemy or mine; whether black or white, Federal or Confederate, monsieur."

Such candor was surprising, perhaps impolite, but it did not seem to displease the Provost Marshal. Marie caught her breath with a half-sob. "But this I can do," she resumed, earnestly. "I can give you my word—and no oath could be more sacred than I will hold it—to give no information whatever regarding his post or bearing in any way upon military affairs to any one, monsieur."

The attention of all present, citizens, guards and officers, was centered on the pale, graceful girl, whose simple mourning dress and pathetic repression of strong emotion excited their respectful sympathy. The Provost Marshal scanned the fair, truthful face, and suddenly inquired her name and place of residence. Both were promptly given. Another quick, scrutinizing look into the depths of her unflinching eyes, and he seized a blank, swiftly filled it out, signed it, and handed it to her.

"How will that do?" said he, pleasantly. She read it, her anxious heart fluttering up to her throat. The precious pass was hers; the conditions named were in the exact words of her voluntary pledge. It was noon when Marie Latour crossed the river on the ferry of the Federal post. A spavined mule and a rickety buggy were procured hard by, with a lad for driver, and the young girl set forth on her mission. At dusk she reached the mouth of the bayou along whose course the rest of her route lay. Here, from the occupant of a solitary house, she learned that the roads beyond were passable, but that all the horses and mules of the neighborhood had been "cleaned out" by the contending armies and the jayhawkers, while on the bayou, as on the river itself, the Federals had destroyed everything in the shape of a boat.

"Do you know the old Frenchman who lives in the swamp on Coulee Noir, some fifteen miles up the bayou?" Marie inquired. "Know ole Baptiste Bonzon?" the man exclaimed. "Reckon so! Some folks 'lows he's crazy," he went on, "an' if he'n' ther' outest raskil goin' is that, it's 'bout time ole Bouzy wur shut up."

Marie pushed on in the moonlight three miles further, to one Jules Guilbeau's, where she had been told she "might git help." Here she stayed the rest of the night. Guilbeau and his wife listened to her story with mingled wonder and pity, and the man at once agreed to go on with her, and bring the sick boy back in his ox-cart, if only he could find his oxen, which had been driven far into the forest for safety. Marie, to be sure, still indulged a hope that Oscar might be sufficiently strong to return in the buggy. And even while she was bargaining for the oxen, her mind, all alert as it was, caught eagerly at a new possibility. For Bouzon had a boat hidden somewhere, Guilbeau said. "Ma foi! Eet stay hide, too," he added, nodding emphatically. "Notto

sev the life of your brothare—no, not for one hundared brothare—he reesk the Yankee to brek hees boat." "But for money?" Marie ventured. "You hev monee, he? Tek a care he know not of that, ma'm'sella!" was the quick reply.

Heading this friendly warning—for the simple honesty of man and wife were past suspicion—she left all but ten dollars of her store in Madame Guilbeau's keeping, and by daybreak was again on her journey. For a time her course lay between small farms on the one hand, and the bayou on the other. Then for miles not a dwelling was to be seen. Forest trees encroached on the road itself.

Suddenly, as she rounded a curve, Jules Guilbeau's tall figure loomed up directly before her. He had been out in search of his oxen, but knowing that at this point the young travelers would require a guide, he had made sure of being here in season to intercept them. Bidding Marie follow, he struck at once into the forest, winding his way through the dense undergrowth, and around the huge, prostrate trunks, until finally a small hut nearly hidden by overreaching trees, stood revealed. At last! And now what awaited them in this miserable shelter? Life or death? Marie sank back limp and faint.

The shanty, made of *plieur*, was just what the roof of a rude building set squarely on the ground might be. A narrow opening in the near gable end was the door. The space before it was strewn with old shoes, rags and other litter. A lean, mangy dog sprang from the bushes and dolefully bayed them.

Jules Guilbeau went in alone, but soon reappeared. "All right!" he said, in a low voice. "Come een, ma'm'selle."

"Thank God, Oscar still lived! New life came to the devoted sister, and when she leaned over the bank where he lay on a bed of loose moss, he knew her. But, oh, it was pitiful to see that fair boyish face so wasted and colorless, and to note the wild yearning in his great black eyes!

"What is it, dear brother?" Marie tenderly asked. "Home!" and tears rolled slowly down his wasted cheeks, though the poor soldier boy struggled to keep them back.

"Eet ees the homesickness he hev," said Guilbeau, gravely, and he hurried off to resume his search for the oxen. Not long after Marie discovered that the driver, too, had disappeared. For a moment the poor girl felt forsaken and well nigh desperate, but the invalid was evidently too weak to sit up, so that the loss of the buggy was really of small account. He must be carried in the ox-cart on a bed of moss, unless, indeed, she could secure Bouzon's boat. In the latter event, and her heart leaped within her at the thought, they could go straight home across the river, while the trip by

ous ride to the post, and another still longer down the opposite bank.

But there was no time to waste. A low fever and that mysterious malady for which there is no cure except home itself were rapidly consuming the young soldier's small remnant of strength.

"Home! home!" was his constant, unreasoning plea hour after hour, till at last, as the sun went down, he fell into a quiet slumber, and his sister walked out to the Coulee.

Lying across the narrow stream was a great cypress, its immense crown of half-dry foliage resting on the further bank. Marie sprang upon a limb, grasping also one above her head. Thus she went from one branch to another, and looking down, saw something that gave her a throb of joy.

"A boat! The boat!" Yes, there it was concealed in a small washout opening into the Coulee. Oh, if the owner would only come! In her excitement, she clambered quickly along the trunk of the tree. What a spectacle greeted her astonished eyes! It was Baptiste Bonzon himself. His lean figure, bent at the knees and hips, was attired in blouse and trousers that were a complex collection of patches, while above his coarse shoes several inches of bare ankles were disagreeably conspicuous.

A funnel-shaped palmetto that came down to a pair of bloodshot black eyes, that gleamed with the fierceness of burning coals above a hooked, dipping nose. The expression of his grizzled, bearded face was full of cunning. There he stood, both bony hands clutching a sack slung over his shoulder, his broad mouth hanging wide open, while he glared at the girl who had sprung from the fallen tree-top as if by some supernatural agency. And Marie? Well, her girlish sense of the ludicrous, aroused by Bouzon's grotesque pose and the oddness of their unexpected encounter, triumphed over the dread inspired by his evil reputation. She sprang lightly from branch to branch, and then to the ground. As she advanced courageously, the man addressed her savagely.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "I am Marie Latour, monsieur, the

sister of Oscar, who is ill in your camp," she replied composedly. "I have come to take my brother home."

"Then take him, and yourself, too, out of my way!" he interrupted, angrily. "I want no women sneaking and spying around me! You hear?"

"I hear, monsieur, and I will do it; but I shall want you to help me."

"Help you? *Malédiction!*" The proposition seemed to strike old Bouzon as one of incredible audacity. He burst into a harsh laugh. "Helping people is not my business!" said he, roughly. "I am a fiend—don't you know that?—black enough, and painted blacker by my good neighbors," and he laughed again maliciously.

"Monsieur," said Marie, gently, "you have given shelter to my poor sick brother, and I thank you for it from my heart. And now," in appealing tones, "with your help we can soon go. You have a boat?"

She stopped aghast, for at the word "boat" the old Frenchman turned livid. His face contracted with the deadliest rage, and he sprang forward with one arm uplifted as if to strike her to the earth. Thanks to Jules Guilbeau, Marie was not altogether unprepared for this attack. She stood before the demented creature, her graceful figure well poised, and her gaze dauntlessly meeting his. What was it in those soft brown eyes that held the murderous arm uplifted as by a spell? And how was it that—with tear-bright eyes and a little smile trembling on her quivering lips—a mere touch of her small, weak hand on that strong arm should cause it to drop limply at the ruffian's side? With averted eyes he turned slowly toward the cabin, followed by Marie, who was determined to make the most of the advantage already gained. He might kill her if he would, she declared, but first he must hear what she had to say.

Beginning with an acknowledgment of the trouble to which Bouzon had been put, she briefly depicted her brother's critical condition and the absolute necessity of getting him home as quickly as possible, and she concluded by declaring that whoever would safely convey him thither should be well paid for his trouble. At the last sentence an eager, hungry look was flashed on the girl from the Frenchman's burning eyes.

After many denials and much haggling, he finally consented to make the trip for ten dollars at the start, fifteen more at Jules Guilbeau's, and twenty-five on landing the brother and sister safely at home,—all to be paid in gold. If ever the rapacious greed of a miser was unconsciously revealed, it was by Baptiste Bouzon at the mere mention of that magic word—gold. Marie congratulated herself upon having so little of it with her.

Guilbeau did not appear that night as he had promised. And what a night it was for Marie, in that lone swampy place, where, with a

terrible fascination, drawn to the pile of moss upon which her uncouth host lay, and invariably she found his gaze fixed on her; while the sick boy, restlessly slumbering, incessantly reiterated his mournful plaint for home and mother. Longing for the cool night air, yet fearing to move, she sat the night out on an old box by her brother's bunk.

Daylight came at last. They were to embark in time to reach the river at dusk, but Bouzon went off early, and did not return until after dark. So another night must be lived through in that horrid place. And still Jules Guilbeau was missing. What if both the men should fail her?

The devoted girl had many moments of despair during that long, dreary night, as she sadly realized her helplessness in that lonely spot; but hope returned with the blessed light of day, even though Bouzon again vanished.

At noon he reappeared and announced that the boat was ready. By five o'clock they arrived at Guilbeau's, and Marie found the good man prostrate with fever. So he had not been faithless at all. She parted from the kind-hearted couple with no little regret, and, paying Bouzon his second instalment of gold,—the rest she had carefully concealed,—was soon ready for another start. To Marie's joy, her brother was already improving; and when they tied up under the willows at the mouth of the bayou, with the broad expanse of the Mississippi in full view, for one moment he actually sat up to look at it.

"Look, sister," he cried, with feeble eagerness, "Burt's Landing is just around that point, two miles from here, and only one mile further—O Marie!—only one mile further are home and mamma, thank the good God!" said the sister, touched by the joyous smile that was strangely pathetic on that emaciated countenance. She ran up to a house near by, and there learned a startling bit of news. Two nights before some mercenary of Burt's Landing had fired into a passing transport, and killed a soldier; as a result of which the place was now occupied by troops, and a gunboat lay at anchor opposite.

She begged her informant to say nothing about this to Bouzon, and determined to make a bold dash for home as soon as darkness should overshadow the river. Oscar was persuaded to take some refreshment, while the old Frenchman ate voraciously of food which the girl had cooked at his shanty, little dreaming, poor wretch, that it was his last supper. The sun went down in dark, mountainous clouds, while lightning played ominously in the distant southeast.

"It is a black night," said Marie, as the boat swept into the river. "*Malédiction!* do you want the sun to shine in the night?" snapped the old man. "Want me to lose my boat? The blacker the night, the better for me," he growled, with an oath.

It was a black night, indeed. The entire heavens were shrouded in gloom, and not a breath of air was stirring.

The river here was but little more than a mile in width. The boat was flat-bottomed, fifteen feet long by four feet broad, its only thwart occupied by the crazy oarsman.

Marie sat by Oscar, on his bed of moss, tenderly cheering him with joyous anticipations of soon reaching home. Thus they were gliding on in the thick darkness, when the girl discovered that the boat was leaking.

Hopefully recalling having once crossed the river in a skiff that had been kept afloat by bailing, she instantly set at work with a tin cup. Still the water increased, and she called on Bouzon to find the leak. He roughly refused. Another time of bailing, without pause, and yet the water rose in the boat.

For several days the poor girl had suffered with grief and anxiety for her brother; during the last two nights she had not closed her eyes, and now an almost irresistible longing for rest would at times seize upon her. Oh, to lie down and let the rising water cover her, and the boat gently sink with her into endless slumber!

But no, no! Oscar must be saved. With that thought she would break from the insidious fascination, and go on with her dreary task. The boat now lay deep in the rapid current, and must soon go down. Oscar called, and Marie tenderly lifted his head from the dripping moss.

"Oh, my brother!" she cried, passionately, "I thought to save you. See what I have done!"

"Dear, brave little sister, he replied, fondly, "you give your precious life in trying to save mine. What more could any one do?"

A gasping sob was the only answer. She gathered the moss high under his head and shoulders, and reached for more that had slipped between the loose planks. As if struck by a blow she started. What was it? The leak? Yes, the leak. It was directly under the middle plank, the only one that was not nailed down. That removed the leak could be caulked.

She pleaded with Bouzon to come to her aid, but he refused, and rowed on. She felt herself going wild. That would never do; so with almost superhuman effort she regained composure, and with it her common sense reassured itself.

Quickly seating herself so that her right hand could be used in bailing, she pressed a handkerchief into the leak with the left, and there firmly held it. The position was cramped, but hope now strengthened her exhausted arms and warmed her chilled frame. If she only had something larger to dip with! If she could only see where they were. Slowly, yet surely, the water lessened as one hand threw it out, while the other kept it back. She now told Oscar of the possibility of their yet being saved; also about the gunboat at Burt's Landing.

As the water gradually decreased, the boat moved less heavily on its course down the great river in the coal-black night. But it was still much too full for safety, and the devoted girl bailed without pausing. The poor little hand, bent under the plank and immersed in the water, though never relaxing its pressure upon the leak, seemed no longer a part of herself, while the entire arm and shoulder were aching almost beyond endurance. And thus they went on, until the wind rose with a sudden gust, which a half-hour before would have sent the boat to the bottom like so much lead.

Then followed a broad glare of lightning. What was that? Burt's Landing? Another flash. Burt's Landing, and the gunboat anchored mid-stream, not three hundred yards distant. Bouzon's oars moved now with quick, rattling jerks. A few moments elapsed, and Oscar touched Marie.

"They are coming," he whispered. "Who?" "Feds."

Just then there came a flash of lightning. About sixty yards to the leeward, a boat, fully manned, was bearing swiftly down in hot pursuit. A shot whizzed over their heads, and a summons to heave to came roaring over the turbid waters. Bouzon, livid and ghastly, rowed like one possessed. Another shot, another summons, these and Marie's adjurations were all alike unheeded by the crazy old man, whose only thought was to save his boat.

"Surrender, or we'll sink you!" was now thundered close at hand, out of the impenetrable gloom. Still the madman rattled on with frantic haste. Capture was no longer dreaded by Marie. It would be timely rescue from the power of a maniac. But what was that? Not rescue! Their doom, instead!

"Steady, there! Now! Send the boat to the bottom!"

For a few seconds she shrank appalled. Then, seizing a sheet from Oscar's bed, and drawing a long, deep breath, her fresh, girlish voice rang out, high and clear, in the gloom.

"We surrender! Help us! Save us!" Instantly the scene sprang to view in a brilliant, prolonged electric illumination. There was Marie's slender, black-robed figure erect and firmly poised in the heaving "flat," her sweet face deathly white and set in unwavering resolve; and, while one hand was extended pleadingly from the other—held high above her uncovered head—the great flag of truce spread abroad on the driving wind. And there was Bouzon—hideous to behold—rowing with a madman's desperation. There, too, was the pursuit boat, swooping down with arrow-like swiftness.

"Hard a-starboard!" That command was fairly roared.

Falling to her knees, Marie clasped her arms around her brother. A crash, a harsh grating, a horrible, blood-curdling shriek of the Frenchman plunging into the water, and the girl sank unconscious.

When Marie Latour again opened her eyes, she was on the gunboat. Os-

car, reclining in a berth opposite the one in which she lay, was talking with animation to three interested listeners. The first words comprehensible to her rallying senses were spoken by a man of commanding appearance wearing a uniform of the captain of the United States Navy.

"A noble mission," he was saying, "and bravely carried out—so far. It shall be my privilege to see that it ends happily."

He was true to his word, and within an hour the same boat that had so nearly sent them to a watery grave, landed Marie and her brother safely at the levee before their gate. In a few brief moments mother and son were reunited, and Marie's mission was accomplished. —*Youth's Companion.*

A Railway Incident.

A good-natured-looking westerner in boots entered a car bound for Rosedale, Mass., on the Providence road. It was very crowded, and people were standing up on all sides. Walking slowly through the aisle he came at last upon a young woman reading a novel, who was occupying the whole of an extra bench, turned over, for the accommodation of a small pug dog that lay comfortably snoozing upon a shawl. The passengers who stood about were eyeing the spectacle with looks of indignation; but not one of them seemed to have had the nerve to protest. The newcomer, however, was not lacking in that quality. "Madam," he said mildly, "it would like to sit down, if you please."

The young female looked up at him from her book with a cold and withering glare. "The seat is engaged," she replied with acrid accents. "By the dog?" "Yes."

"Has the dog a ticket?" (No answer.) "Oh, I'm sorry he hasn't a ticket," said the man from the west, "because I will have to bounce him off the train."

And with that he picked up Mr. Pug by the back of the neck and gently tossed him through the open car window, and calmly took the seat thus made vacant.

The train had come to a pause at Roxbury station just a minute before, and was only beginning to move as this occurred. The dog alighted upon the ground uninjured and at once scampered out of sight. The mistress who had not had time to interfere—so quickly was the thing done—jumped to her feet with a scream of surprise and would certainly have gone for the wool of her adversary, had not the conductor at that very instant thrust his hand at her forehead. To the latter, who had not seen the occurrence, owing to the crowd, she made an hysterical appeal for redress, begging him at the same time to stop the engine so that her pet might be picked up. But another passenger put in a word, upon which the official said that she had been served quite right and that she might get off at the next station. This she did.—*New Orleans Picayune.*

Adventures of a Siberian Wolf-Hound.

A stranger to our shores, exhibited at the New York Dog Show, was Ivan Romanoff, Consul-General War's Siberian wolf-hound. Ivan came from the Imperial kennels at St. Petersburg, his breeder being the Czar of Russia, and his catalogue price was \$10,000. He was entered for exhibition by Edward Kelly, who had forgotten his pedigree, which was said to be unknown. Ivan could not be induced to harm a human being, but it is his nature to destroy every other living creature that crosses his path.

His first adventure in New York was at the menagerie in Central Park where he tried to eat up the buffaloes. Half the policeman at the old arsenal were after him with clubs and revolvers, but he paid not the slightest attention to them. Blows made him only the more eager to get at his prey. At last his master reached the scene, and at a word from him Ivan gave up the chase. When snow came he was almost wild. He rolled in it, played with it, ate it, and then rushed about for something to kill. Cats disappeared by the dozen. In Sixth avenue he snapped the chain that held him and attacked a stuffed bear that stood hugging a pole in front of a fur store. For this unseemly conduct he was locked up with his attendant at a police station. His owner bailed him out, but after that Ivan had to wear a muzzle. He is a superb beast, built somewhat on the lines of a greyhound, only heavier and with longer hair. He has a tail like a collic, and the softest eye that ever dog was blessed with.

The left side of his face is black, including the hair around the eye, and he has a black patch on his right flank. Elsewhere he is as white as the snow of Siberia.—*New York Tribune.*

The Persian Shah's Unwelcome Visits.

A terrible bugbear to the British Foreign Office is the Shah of Persia, who is anxious to pay another visit to London, where he made himself so obnoxious during the last exhibition. The Shah, his suites, his harem and his followers occupied Buckingham Palace, and it is said that this handsome building more resembled the shambles than a palace, when the Shah resumed his peregrinations, always at the entire cost of his unwilling hosts. The Shah had the idea of proceeding to Baku to greet the Czar and his family on their voyage to their Caucasian provinces, but the Emperor declined the honor with thanks, and now his Persian Majesty has reserved his visit to Paris for the exhibition, the gay capital offering during such festivities the most alluring inducements to the Eastern potentate.—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

One Dr. Beer, in England, is advocating the sting of bees as a remedy for rheumatism. He declares that he has treated with success 173 cases and has given in all 39,000 stings.