SECRET SERVICE

BEING THE HAPPENINGS OF A NIGHT IN RICHMOND IN THE SPRING OF 1865.

THE PLAY BY WILLIAM GILLETTE;

BY CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDGAR BERT SMITH

COPYRIGHT 1912 BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

SYNOPSIS.

Mrs. Varney, wife of a Confederate general, has lost one son and another is dying from wounds. She reluctantly gives her consent for Wilfred, the youngest, to join the army if his father consents. The federals are making their last assault in an effort to capture Richmond.

CHAPTER II.

A Commission From the President.

The door giving entrance to the hall was opened unceremoniously by the rotund and privileged Martha. She came at an opportune time, relieving the tension between the mother and son.

Wilfred was not insensible to his mother's feelings, but he was determined to go to the front. He was glad of the interruption and rather shamefacedly took advantage of it by leaving the room.

"Well, Martha, what is it?" asked Mrs. Varney, striving to regain her composure.

"Deys one ob de men fum de hospiple heah, ma'am."

"Another one?"

"Ah 'clah to goodness, ma'am, dey jes' likeeps a-comin' an' a-comin'. 'Pears like we cain't keep no close fo' ourse'f; dé sheets an' tablecloths an' napkins an' eben de young misses' petticoats, dey all hab to go."

"And we have just sent all the bandages we have," said Mrs. Varney, smiling.

"Den we got to git some mo'. Dey says dey's all used up, an' two mo' trains jes' come in crowded full o' wounded sojahs—an' mos' all ob 'em dreffeul bad!"

"Is Miss Kittridge here yet, Martha?"

"Yas'm, Ah jes' seed her goin' thu de hall into de libr'y."

"Ask her if they have anything to send. Even if it's only a little, let them have it. What they need most is bandages. There are some in How-ard's room, too. Give them half of what you find there. I think what we have left will last long enough to—to—"

"Yas'm," said old Martha, sniffing. "Ah'm a-gwine. Does you want to see de man?"

"Yes, send him in," said Mrs. Varney.

There was a light tap on the door after Martha went out.

"Come in," said the mistress of the house, and there entered to her a battered and dilapidated specimen of young humanity, his arm in a sling. "My poor man!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney. "Sit down."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Martha," she called to the old woman, who paused at the door on her way to the stairs, "don't you get something to eat and drink for this gentleman?"

"Well, the pantry ain't obahflowin', as you know, Mrs. Varney. But Ah reckon Ah might fin' a glass o' milk ef Ah jes' had to."

"All our wine has gone long ago," said Mrs. Varney to the soldier, "but if a glass of milk—"

"I haven't seen a glass of milk for three years, ma'am," answered the man, smiling; "it would taste like nectar."

"Martha will set it for you in the dining room while you are waiting. What hospital did you come from, by the way?"

"The Winder, ma'am."

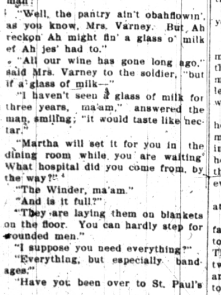
"And is it full?"

"They are laying them on blankets on the floor. You can hardly step for wounded men."

"I suppose you need everything."

"Everything, but especially bandages."

"Have you been over to St. Paul's



"Edith Dear, How Late You Are."

church? The ladies are working there tonight."

"Yes, ma'am, I've been over there, but they're not working for the hospital; they're making sand-bags for fortifications."

"And where are you from?"

"I'm a Louisiana Tiger, ma'am," answered the man proudly.

"You don't look much like it now," said the woman, smiling.

"No, I guess the lamb is more like me now, but just wait until I get well enough to go to the front again," admitted the soldier cheerfully.

At this moment one of the ladies who had been working in the other room came in carrying a small packet of bandages done up in a coarse brown paper.

"Oh, Miss Kittridge," said Mrs. Varney, "here is the gentleman who—"

Miss Kittridge was a very businesslike person.

"This is every scrap we have," she said, handing the soldier the parcel with a little bow. "If you will come back in an hour or two, perhaps we shall have more for you."

"Thank you, ladies, and God bless you. I don't know what our poor fellows in the hospitals would do if it weren't for you."

"Don't forget your milk in the dining room," said Mrs. Varney.

"I'm not likely to, ma'am," returned the soldier, as, in spite of his wounded arm, he bowed gracefully to the women.

In the hall Martha's voice could be heard exclaiming:

"Come right dis way, you po' chile, an' see what Ah's got fo' you in de dinin' room."

"You must be tired to death," said Mrs. Varney to Miss Kittridge, looking at the white face of the other woman. Her brother had been killed a few days before, but the ends had scarcely rattled down upon his coffin before she was energetically at work again—for other women's brothers.

"No, no," she said bravely, "and our tiredness is nothing compared to the weariness of our men. We are going to stay late tonight, Mrs. Varney, if you will let us. There's so many more wounded come in it won't do to stop now. We have found some old linen that will make splendid bandages, and—"

"My dear girl," said the matron, "stay as long as you possibly can. I will see if Martha can't serve you something to eat after a while. I don't believe there is any tea left in the house."

"Bread and butter will be a feast," said Miss Kittridge.

"And I don't believe there is much butter either," smiled the older woman.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the other, "is your son—is there any change?"

"Not for the better," was the reply. "I am afraid his fever is increasing."

"And has the surgeon seen him this evening?"

"Not tonight."

"Why not?" exclaimed Miss Kittridge in great surprise. "Surely his condition is sufficiently critical to demand more than one brief visit in the morning."

"I can't ask him to come twice with so many waiting for him," said Mrs. Varney.

"But they would not refuse you, Mrs. Varney," said Miss Kittridge quickly. "There's that man going back to the hospital, he's in the dining room yet. I'll call him and send word that—"

She started impulsively toward the door, but Mrs. Varney caught her by the arm.

"No," she said firmly, "I can't let you."

"Not for your own son?"

"I am thinking of the sons of other mothers. The surgeon has done all that he can for him. And think how many other sons would have to be neglected if he visited mine twice. He will come again tomorrow."

The second woman stood looking at her in mingled sympathy and amazement, and there was a touch of pride in her glance, too. She was proud of her sex, and she had a right to be there in Richmond that spring, if ever.

"I understand," said Miss Kittridge at last. "I suppose you are right."

They stared at each other, white-faced, a moment, when there entered to them youth and beauty incarnate. There was enough resemblance between the pale, white-haired mother and the girlish figure in the doorway to proclaim their relationship. The girl's cheek had lost some of its bloom and some of its roundness. There was too much that was appalling and fearful in and about Richmond then not to leave its mark even upon the most youthful and the most buoyant, yet things did not come home to the young as they did to those older. She was still a lovely picture, especially in the soft radiance of the candles. She carried her hat in her hand. The flowers upon it were assuredly those of yesteryear, it would not have passed muster as the mode anywhere except in besieged Richmond; and her dress, although it fitted her perfectly, was worn and faded and had been turned and patched and altered until it was quite beyond further change, yet she wore it as airily as if it had been tissue of silver or cloth of gold.

The mother's face brightened.

"Edith, dear," she exclaimed, "how late you are! It is after eight o'clock. You must be tired out!"

"I am not tired at all," answered the girl cheerily. "I have not been at the hospital all afternoon; this is my day off. How is Howard?"

"I wish I could say just the same, but he seems a little worse."

The girl's face went suddenly grave. She stepped over to her mother, took her hand and patted it softly.

"Is there nothing you can do?"

"My dear," said her mother, "Howard—we—are all in God's hands."

She drew a long breath and lifted her head bravely.

"Miss Kittridge," said the girl, "I have something very important to tell mother, and—"

Miss Kittridge smiled back at her.

"I am going right away, honey. There is lots of work for us to do and—"

"You don't mind, I hope," said Edith Varney, calling after her as she went into the hall.

"No, indeed," was the reply.

Mrs. Varney sat down wearily by the table, and Edith pulled up a low stool and sat at her feet.

"Well, my dear?"

"Mamma, what do you think? What do you think?"

"I think a great many things," said Mrs. Varney, "but—"

"Yes, but you wouldn't ever think of this."

"Certainly I shall not, unless you tell me."

"Well, I have been to see the president."

"The president—Mr. Davis?"

"Yes."

"And what did you go to see the president for?"

"I asked him for an appointment for Captain Thorne."

"For Captain Thorne! My dear—"

"Yes, mother, for the war department telegraph service. And he gave it to me, a special commission. He gave it to me for father's sake and for Captain Thorne's sake—he has met him and likes him—and for my own."

"What sort of an appointment?"

"Appointing him to duty here in Richmond, a very important position. He won't be sent to the front, and he will be doing his duty just the same."

"But, Edith, you don't—you can't—"

"Yes, it will, mother. The president—I just love him—told me they need a man who understood telegraphing and who was of high enough rank to take charge of the service. As you know, most of the telegraph operators are privates, and Captain Thorne is an expert. Since he's been here in Richmond he's been