

CHAPTER LV.

AFTER the battle the army moved forward, but the main portion of the wounded were sent back. Not with the hospital train, but in selected ambulances, with a special escort, and with orders that their own wishes as to destination should be consulted.

Our wounded heroes of the Kansas scouts were retired to the rear.

The news of their glorious conduct, as well as of their condition, reached their friends in St. Louis, over the wires, before the sun had set on the field of carnage.

Was it then to be wondered at, when they reached the pleasant town of De Soto, on a south fork of the Osage, that a kindly face beamed into the end of the ambulance containing three of the most noted of our heroes—Buffalo Bill, Frank Stark, and little Joe Bevins.

It was that of Mr. La Valliere the banker.

"How are you, my brave boys—how are you?" he cried, as he saw their faces brighten on recognition of his own.

"Fifty per cent better than dead men, sir!" cried our hero.

"What do you know of per cent, my boy?" cried

the banker, laughing. "Are you not tired of jolting along in this old ambulance?"

"Rather, sir—rather, but there's no use in saying you're tired when it is best to go on!"

"You'll not go any further for the present," said Mr. La Valliere. "You are under my charge until you are able to be out once more. I have engaged a house and some nurses for you. Nurses are scarce out here, but if those I've engaged don't suit, we'll try and improve on them. Driver, you see that large house with the old flag flying over it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Drive to that. It is my private hospital till I get these reckless boys made over again."

In a few moments the ambulance halted before the door of the largest building in the place.

Servants trooped out to carry the wounded in, and soon every man found himself in the best quarters he had seen since the opening of the war.

After each man of the first three named had been placed on cots which occupied a large room into which the sun, now on its western slope, threw soft, rosy rays, Mr. La Valliere looked at them pleasantly and asked if there was anything else they required just then.

"Your nurses will come when you call them—there is a bell on the table in reach of each one of you," said he, as he went out.

"To thunder with the nurses when we've got so much comfort as this around us!" said Buffalo Bill,

when Mr. La Valliere quietly walked out of the room.

"I'm going to ring for mine," said little Joe, "just to see if he is white or black."

Tingle, tingle, went his bell.

"Och, you blissid little darlint—is it your own Kitty Muldoon you're wantin'?" cried a familiar voice, and the buxom little body rushed to the bedside and half smothered him with kisses, not caring "a hawbee" for the witnesses to this outpouring of her heart's love.

It was surprising how quickly every bell in that room rung for a nurse then.

And never were bells answered more promptly.

Little Lou, beautiful as a rose and pure as the dew which gems it in the still breath of morning, was quickly at the bedside of her young love's first dream.

Lillie, all blushes and tremulous with joy, was bending tearfully over Frank Stark, while Lottie, more bashful than all the rest, sweet May flower as she was, came in as a kind of supernumerary, ready to help where help was most needed.

Another came in, led by the good banker, and Buffalo Bill turned even from his idolized Lou to give vent to the love and reverence that he felt for his mother.

Her white hand was so soft and cooling to his brow—her words of low praise and thankfulness that while he had done his duty, he had been spared—all, all was like magic medicine to his bruised and gashed body.

Mr. La Valliere looked at this scene a few moments and then made a very singular, but, under the circumstances, a not very inappropriate speech.

He coughed a little to clear his voice and then proceeded thusly :

"My friends, the recollections of a busy lifetime, as H. G. would say, throng in upon me just now and suggest various eventful experiences of my own.

"First, a penny saved counts as much in bank as a penny earned. Second, persons interested in the ownership of property are always more careful of it than those who are merely hired to take care of it. These and a few other considerations have caused me to call in the services of my friend here, Chaplain Danner, for the purpose of making this nurse business a 'joint-stock' affair, technically speaking.

"Lou, my darling, take that pallid looking hero of yours by the hand, while this gentleman speaks the words which I hope will make you both happy."

Tears of joy as well as wonder filled the eyes of the brave scout, when that trusting little hand was placed in his own. His voice grew strong as he responded to the questions, and when he uttered the vow to "love, protect, and cherish," it came up from the inner depths of as true a heart as ever beat for woman! Heaven bless him and her.

"Your turn next, my pretty Lillie," said the banker, as he approached the thrice perilled and thrice rescued heroine, and the brave man who for her sake had turned from evil ways and was striving for the good.

Soon that ceremony was over—none were there who could or would object.

For base indeed is the heart which will turn from him who has left the darkness, of his own free will, and come out into the light.

Foul and most ungenerous is the nature which will not rejoice to grasp the hand of him who has been redeemed from error, and who in the strength of redeemed manhood has honorably proven himself worthy of a good cause and pure, ennobling associations.

There was more to be done. Little Kitty stood open-mouthed, blushing and turning white by turns as the marriages went on, and now she trembled like a leaf when Mr. La Valliere approached her.

"There will be no objections here I hope!" said the banker, with a smile as he approached the bedside of Joe Bevins. "What do you say, Kitty; do you love Joe well enough to take him for better or for worse?"

"Faith, sir, I don't believe I'll find a better, and if I waited, I might find a worse, and if he's willin' I'm not the big fool to say no. But sure there's one thing—he mustn't take me away from missis, for I've promised in me heart never to lave her that has been so good to the poor lone girl I was when she found me."

"I'll never take you from them you love, Kitty, for I hope always to be near Bill myself, and he'll never lose sight of his mother, I know."

"Then let his riverence go ahead as soon as he

places," said Kitty, as she put her chubby little hand into that of Joe.

This last ceremony was soon over, and our story is in such a happy stopping place, that I believe it must be closed.

It is enough to say that Buffalo Bill, Joe Bevins, and Frank Stark yet live—that ever since they were linked to live-candy framed *en statuette*, they've led lives of wild adventure on the far western plains, which may yet be worked up into another exciting border tale by your very much obliged friend—THE AUTHOR.

THE END.