

TWIXT LIFE AND DEATH

ON UNDER MEDICAL ADVICE.

A Story of the Franco-Prussian War.

BY ROBERT BUCHANAN.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEDALLION.

As the night advanced, the wounded man lay down to sleep. His heart was too deeply stirred, his mind too troubled, for her even to close her eyes. She sat watching patiently, thinking of all the sad and for me of war, of the strange events which had brought the young officer that house, and, above all, of her father. She thought of the house beyond the Rhine, where the soldier's sister, a girl like herself, was waiting for him, perhaps praying on his knees. She could not bear to think that his heart, his father's heart, was right. War was no evil thing, and over the enemies of France had been many battles, with dear ones to watch their coming and their going.

"Mon Dieu! what is it? Ah, try to compose yourself!" she cried.

"Who's there? Who speaks?" he cried, in German. "Look, look—that face! Can you not, there, against the wall?"

"I am the doctor," she said, "and your father is safe."

"Yes, but do not question any more."

"Look, look, here you are!"

"Good gracious! You are surprised; 'clean still, I think—I think that I am dying! No, no; you will live!"

"Whether I live or die, I have a duty to fulfil—a solemn duty. Something would move my sleep—a voice—his voice. Hold down your ear; I must speak to you."

"Not now—too soon."

"His face becomes almost stern in resolve as he recited."

"I must have last service. Let me ease my heart, let me keep my promise."

"He reached out his trembling hand and grasped her by the wrist. In her horror and pity she could say no more. He went on:

"The war! Ah, what a curse is war! It turns men to devils. Even I would speak to you have stood upon my hands. Once I cut up a man in the north, I killed a Frenchman."

"His excuse was so terrible that she would have shrank away had he not held her."

"Listen, Blanche. We were detached to storm a castle, held by a handful of the French. As we crept forward in the darkness, I saw a man, a soldier, lying like a sentinel in the moonlight. His back was toward us; he didn't seem to hear us coming. I was upon him before he could turn or fly. I cut him down with my sword; he fell with a groan."

"I am here for God's sake!" moaned the frightened girl; "I cannot live."

"But though his hold upon her was weak and trembling, she had not the strength to draw herself away."

"We reached the cottage. The light of the moon, I stepped back into the moonlight. Suddenly I heard a voice faintly calling to me. Stooping, I beheld the officer. He had cut down, was dead, but dying. Touching with compassion, I knelt beside him and traced his name upon his lips. God in His mercy gave her strength, and at last she conquered. Come what might, she felt that she could not let the man perish without making an attempt to save him."

"Padre, forgive me!" she moaned, piteously, while she saw for the first time the tears began to trickle down her cheeks. "Forgive me! I cannot let him die!"

Moving quickly to the mantelpiece, she took the veil, and with a trembling hand lowered upon the life-giving drops; then, with a sigh of relief, she laid him in the bed. "And now, once again, the horror comes upon her to think she must approach so near and even touch the being she loathed so much."

The clock ticked on the moments, while she watched the agonized struggles of the sinking man. In a few minutes it would be too late—perhaps, indeed, it was too late already.

"I have done my duty and duty. Now I have undertaken the great trial of her life. God in His mercy gave her strength, and at last she conquered. Come what might, she felt that she could not let the man perish without making an attempt to save him."

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