

THE COURAGE OF WOMEN.



AMONG the mental qualifications peculiar to men and women, there is not one more firmly believed in than that courage is an attribute of the male sex, and that timidity is equally characteristic of the female. In fact, the possession of courage among women is frequently considered rather derogatory than otherwise, and it has often

enough come under my notice that ladies have affected a timidity which they certainly did not feel, rather than expose themselves to the suspicion of possessing so unfeminine a quality. If rightly considered, however, so far from courage being solely peculiar to men, it might be found, were the question fairly investigated, that it is about equally divided between men and women. Were, however, the medical profession appealed to for their opinion, it is more than probable, from their great opportunities of watching both men and women in the hour of danger, they might give the palm to the latter. Upon that point of course I will not pretend to decide. I, personally, believe courage to be equally divided between men and women, and to prove that my theory is not without reason to support it, I will offer to the reader a few examples out of many which might be brought forward of heroic courage displayed by women.

Before commencing, however, let me define what I mean by the word courage. In the first place, I take it to be the quality which leads men to meet danger without fear or shrinking. Seneca also somewhere says that no courage can exceed that of facing death without fear. Assuming then that the above may be considered as true definitions of the word, I will now bring under the reader's notice a few—a very few—examples in proof of my theory. The proximate cause of my taking up the subject is shortly as follows:—

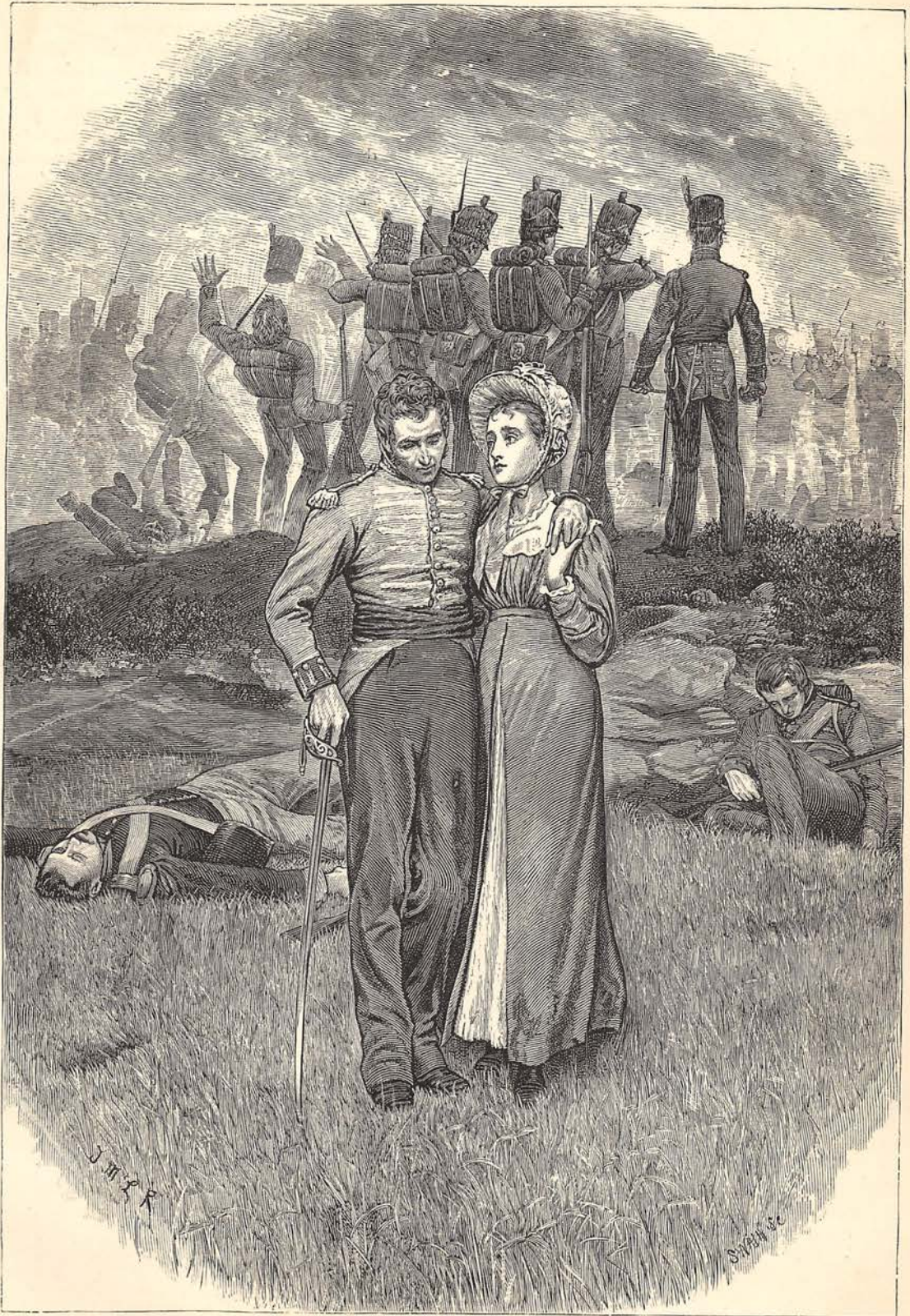
A short time since a paragraph, which appeared in the daily papers, came under my notice, in which it was stated that a lady, a Mrs. Mellor, sister-in-law to Mr. Justice Mellor, saw from her carriage a large retriever dog, in a rabid state, seize a little girl by the arm, inflicting on it a serious wound. Mrs. Mellor immediately descended from her carriage, and the child having been rescued from the dog, she first sucked the virus from the arm, and then took the little sufferer to a surgeon, who cauterised the wound. The child was then restored to her parents.

Here, without any of the pomp or circumstance of

war, without any excitement of the battle-field, without the passions being roused either by anger or the necessity of self-defence, was performed a cool, determined act of daring, which could not have been exceeded by the most rampant hero that ever elicited the applause and admiration of the vulgar. It was also spontaneously performed, there was no "screwing up the courage to the sticking point," all was done with perfect self-possession. That Mrs. Mellor knew the deadly danger contained in the virus, was proved by the fact that it was to defend the child from it she performed the heroic feat. We read in history how Queen Eleanor, to save her husband's life, sucked the suspected poison from the wound inflicted by the would-be assassin, and for that feat alone (for little more is authentically known of her) she has been honoured by all posterity till her name has almost become a household word among us. But honourable and courageous as the action of the Queen indisputably was, it was also certainly less than the one I have mentioned. Queen Eleanor, I admit, in no way thought of the risk she ran when attempting to save the life of a beloved husband; but the child was neither kith nor kin to Mrs. Mellor—on the contrary, she was a total stranger—yet the danger incurred was possibly the greater of the two.

It would, at first sight, appear difficult to equal the heroism displayed in the above good action, and impossible to surpass it, yet if further inquiry be made on the subject, equal courage may very frequently be found in women when carrying out objects which interest them, and that too with a cool determination it would be impossible to exceed. Of similar self-denying heroism in women, when assisting a comparative stranger, I will quote one instance out of many which have come under my notice.

Some twenty years since, a violent attack of small-pox broke out in a station in a remote district of Bengal, and that with such virulence as to resemble a pestilence rather than an epidemic. Rich and poor, high and low, English and native, were alike its victims; and medical science and sanitary precautions seemed alike unavailing to arrest its progress. But while the spread of the disease caused alarm and anxiety in the minds of the British authorities and other male portions of the community resident in the station, there was another—and one only second, perhaps, to death itself—apparent to the female portion—the chance of personal disfigurement should they escape from an attack of the disease. Many fled; others, whose duties as wives or mothers detained them at the station, remained closely shut up in their compounds, taking every precaution against the admission of strangers, especially natives, who might inadvertently bring with them the seeds of the malady. These precautions, however, were very difficult to be effectually carried out, almost the whole of the servants being natives and, notwithstanding the careful manner



(Drawn by J. M'L. RALSTON.)

"ASSISTED HER HUSBAND, WHO WAS WOUNDED IN THE LEG, TO A PLACE OF SAFETY."

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in which they were watched, frequently in communication with other natives in the vicinity.

Among the ladies who remained in the station was the wife of a lieutenant, whose name unhappily I now forget, as it is well worthy of honourable mention. This lady was not only exceedingly handsome, but it was whispered that she more than half suspected the fact herself. Of course to her the possibility of an attack of small-pox was a subject of great alarm, and there was but little doubt she would, had it been possible, have left the station with the other ladies; but shortly after the outbreak she became a mother, and, of course, it was judged inadvisable, even if possible, for her to undertake a journey. She recovered somewhat slowly, and the more so as she was afraid of employing a wet-nurse from fear of the contagion, although a native woman had been especially engaged for that purpose.

The epidemic now began to subside, but was not yet quite extinct when the lady heard that the woman who had been engaged as a wet-nurse had been attacked by the disease, and was then not only in great danger, but almost uncared for, as the natives who had escaped the malady objected to incur the possibility of the danger they had so lately escaped from. My heroine, however, when she heard of the neglected condition of the poor creature, greatly sympathised with her, the more so as the woman before her marriage had been an Ayah in her own service.

She would willingly have visited her, but she remembered as she looked at her baby that she had a life depending upon her besides her own. And then the thought suddenly flashed across her mind—what was the condition of the poor Ayah's baby? Her answer to the mute questions she had put to herself had so great an effect, that without a moment's hesitation she bent her steps to the poor creature's hut, and, on arriving, found standing before it three old native women, one among them holding in her arms a sickly, emaciated baby, a few weeks old, too feeble to cry, and apparently dying. On inquiring whose baby it was, the lady was informed that it belonged to the Ayah, who had died of the disease an hour before, and they were then taking it away to feed it if possible, but they feared it was too far gone. The lady, however, justly believing that while there was life there was hope, regardless of all danger, took the child from the old woman's arms, and fed it herself. Fortunately, the infant had sufficient strength left to profit by the lady's charity; and, its meal over, it was again placed in the old woman's arms, and the lady returned to her home, having not only braved the danger of infection from the disease the mother had died of, but also the risk to her scarcely less terrible, if she recovered from the attack, of being disfigured for life.

Should it be thought that the cases I have quoted were of a class especially calculated to develop that natural instinct in all women, the tendency to assist and defend children, let me now submit another in which that stimulus did not exist. Here, fortunately, I

am able to state the name of my heroine. The reader has no doubt read, and with pleasure, fugitive poems which have appeared in divers magazines under the *nom de plume* of Sadi, whose real name was Sarah Williams, a young lady of great ability and more than ordinary personal attractions. Although there had been nothing in the current of this young lady's life which in any way had tended to inure her to danger, she exhibited at her death, which occurred when she was still a girl, an amount of calm, determined courage, which the bravest man that ever lived could not have surpassed.

Miss Williams had for some months suffered from a most painful disease—cancer—which the highest professional skill had been unable to cure, or even to arrest its progress. At length it increased to a degree which rendered a surgical operation absolutely necessary. From the nature of the disease, however, this operation could not be performed without great personal danger to the sufferer. Although, of course, this alarming contingency was concealed as far as possible from Miss Williams, she had sufficient penetration to perceive, supported as it was by her own conviction, that the operation would be attended with the greatest danger, while the chance of recovery was small indeed.

The operation was at length finally decided on, and a day was fixed for its performance. During the week which had to elapse before the operation, day by day the impression became more deeply stamped on the poor girl's mind that she should not survive it. This feeling continued to increase till the night before the operation, when the anxious doubt changed into the settled conviction that there was no chance of her living, and she calmly prepared herself for death. From the painful nature of the disease she could not sleep, and "the ruling passion being strong in death," she calmly occupied some hours of the night in writing an adieu to her friends in verse, which, judged from a literary point of view, was perhaps one of the best of her productions. If the style of the handwriting, as has been frequently urged, is a clue to the state of the writer's mind, the manuscript ought to be looked upon as a psychological wonder, as it would be impossible to produce any specimen of handwriting that betrayed less perturbation of mind or want of calmness. Even the celebrated despatch of Nelson during the fight at Copenhagen could not have surpassed it.

Her poem over, she stretched herself on her bed, and in a spirit of religious resignation awaited the time fixed for the operation. Although performed in the most scientific manner, and every kindness and attention shown to the poor sufferer, her prognostications were fully verified, and she added another to the list of noble heroines whom death maketh not afraid.

It may now be fairly argued that the above examples have been especially marked by those features in which feminine courage would have the most favourable opportunities to display itself, but in the excitement of any sudden overwhelming danger, such as the horrors

of the battle-field, they would be found lamentably wanting, even if courage of the kind were in any case an honourable attribute in women.

Without analysing the latter point, it may easily be shown that women are perfectly able to face the dangers of the field of battle, and that with as much courage as men, especially if supported by the wish to perform some act of womanly kindness. Out of many examples of the kind which present themselves to my memory, I will select one.

Many years since, I was acquainted with an elderly lady—a Mrs. Tucker, whose husband, a captain in the 27th Foot, or Inniskillens, was with his regiment at Waterloo, as well as her brother, a Captain Smith. This regiment, although seldom brought prominently forward in accounts of that celebrated battle, fought as gallantly as any in the British army, and suffered as much—possibly more. Mrs. Tucker had followed the army from Brussels, and was at some short distance in the rear at the commencement of the battle.

Hearing from a wounded soldier who was carried past her that her husband also was wounded, she managed to make her way to the regiment, and assisted her husband, who was wounded in the leg, to a place of safety. Afterwards hearing that her brother was wounded, she a second time managed to reach what was left of the gallant regiment, and succeeded in performing the same kind office for her brother.

Here possibly it may be said that the strong affection felt by the brave lady for her husband and brother, blinded her to the danger she ran while rescuing them from their perilous position when stretched wounded on the field of battle. Assuming the objection to be a valid one, let me offer to the reader's notice another proof of female courage when exposed

to all the dangers of a sanguinary fight, in which family affection played no part in supporting the fortitude the actors displayed, their only stimulus being the desire to succour the sick and wounded. I allude to the Greek sisters of charity, who acted as nurses to the Russian troops defending Sebastopol in the Crimean war. Not only during the whole length of the siege were these ladies within range of the shot and shells of the besieging army, pursuing their humane duties without one of their number flinching even for a moment, but during the last terrible bombardment—the *feu d'enfer*, as the French general graphically called it—they were as calm and self-possessed as the most seasoned veteran. Of the severity of this last terrible episode of the siege some idea may be formed from the fact that, during the last thirty-six hours, from the different batteries of the besiegers two shells or shot *per minute* were fired at the town. So fearful was the slaughter, that the dwelling-houses had to be turned into temporary hospitals, and nothing was more common than for a shell to crash through a room in which these ladies were engaged in nursing the wounded. Many were severely injured, and some killed, yet not one among them, even in the most trying circumstances, betrayed the slightest fear, or uttered a wish to be relieved from her duties.

The instances of female heroism which could be quoted might fill a volume, and doubtless instances not less meritorious than those I have named have come under the reader's own notice. Nothing, in fact, is more common; and if only fair justice were duly given to woman's heroism, it would be admitted that she has as ample an amount of courage as man—latent, it is true, but easily developed when required in a good, and especially humane, cause.

W. GILBERT.

LOVE IN THE OLDEN TIMES.

I.—MORNING.

SAW my ladye when the dawn
Grew radiant in the summer morn;
I watched her tread the dewy lawn,
As lithe and lustrous-eyed as fawn
Beneath the white-flowered thorn.

Her russet hair was clasped with band
Of silver fillet, 'stead of comb,
Gold-rippling, like the golden sand
That lies upon the ocean strand,
Fringed with its silvery foam.

And as she went with stately mien,
Stalked by her side her deer-hound proud;
So moved my white-robed forest-queen
Through shade of trees and sward of green,
As moonlight moves through cloud.

Onward she fared through glade and dell,
While on her wrist she bore her hawk,
With jess, and hood, and silver bell,
Whose tinkling music rose and fell,
Shook by her rhythmic walk.

II.—NOON.

I sought my ladye in her bower—
'Twas at the noon of summer day—
Mid gloom of leaf and bloom of flower,
As, sheltered from the glowing hour,
In cool repose she lay.

I took the cithern from her side;
My pulsing fingers stirred the cords
Till, passion-charged, the strings replied
In a low wail of song that sighed
—My love too deep for words.

And then I sang of gallant knight
True to his love and to his faith,
Who wore upon his helmet bright
His ladye's glove in sorest fight,
And breathed her name in death.

I spied the flush spread o'er her cheek,
I marked her bosom heave and fall;
Yet dared I not my love to speak—
The strength of passion made me weak:
My tell-tale eyes told all.

