

# **SECOND TO NONE.**

A Military Romance.

VOL. III.

BY

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**SECOND TO NONE.**

## **CHAPTER I.**

### **WE TAKE THE FIELD AGAIN.**

While we were in quarters at Paderborn, a mixed detachment (composed of men for various corps) arrived to join the army, and with it came Major Shirley, looking quite the same as when I had seen him last, on the morning we marched from Wadhurst—his uniform new and spotless, his aiguillettes glittering, his wellfitting gloves of the whitest kid, above which he wore pearl rings; his hair curled and perfumed, with his handsome figure, suave and courtly bearing, his sinister and unfathomable smile.

He was one of those lucky fellows who have mysterious interest (feminine probably) at head-quarters, and who, whether at home or abroad, are always on the staff, and never with their regiments; thus he had been appointed extra aide-de-camp to Lord George Sackville, and thus we chanced to meet on the day of his arrival at an old windmill which did duty as a staff-office for the British head-quarters.

"Did you see my cousin, Miss Gauntlet, before leaving England?" I inquired, though in reality caring little whether he had or not.

"Oh yes, frequently—especially when I was last in London; she is the reigning toast at White's and elsewhere."

"She was well, I hope?" said I, dryly.

"Well, and looking beautiful as ever."

"Did she charge you with any message to me?"

"None, Sir Basil. Zounds! none, at least, that I can remember," replied the major, colouring.

"Is there any word of her being married yet?" I asked, having a natural anxiety to know *who* might next be proprietor of my paternal acres. "So handsome a girl, and so rich, too, should certainly not lack offers."

"Nor does she, 'sdeath—nor does she." replied Shirley, as a shade of vexation mingled with his perpetual smile.

"Aha, major," thought I; "an unsuccessful wooer—eh!"—"And so you have no message for me?"

"None; but I have just delivered one of more importance than that of a London belle—one for the army."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we are to take the field at once, and advance into Hesse."

"Against whom?"

"The Duc de Broglie."

On hearing this, to me, familiar name, it was my turn to feel a tinge of vexation.

"Our muster-place is Fulda; there the allies are to be concentrated;" and with his constant smile which showed all his white teeth, with his gold eyeglass in his right eye, and his gilt spurs ringing, our gay staff-officer left me.

As it is my object to confine these pages as much as possible to my own adventures, avoiding anything like a general narrative of the war, the reader may learn briefly, that when summoned to the field, the Scots Greys marched to Hesse, "through roads which—as our records have it—no army had ever traversed before," and encamped at Rothenburg, in a pleasant vale, sheltered by high hills.

In April we moved to Fulda, from whence Prince Ferdinand began to advance at the head of thirty thousand men against the Duc de Broglie, whom we found strongly posted near the village of Bergen, which occupies a wooded eminence between Frankfort and Hanover. This village was defended by earthen works, along which were rows of *corbeilles*, as the French name those large baskets which, on being filled with earth, are placed close to each other, and serve to cover the defenders of a bastion. They are usually eighteen inches high, and are always wider at the top than at the bottom; thus the opening between forms a species of loophole, and through these apertures the red musketry was flashing incessantly as we came within range.

On the 13th of April we attacked the duke.

Early in the morning our corps took post in the line of battle; but it was not till ten a.m. that the columns of attack moved across the plain in front of the French army, whose artillery bowled long and bloody lanes through them.

"Preston," said Major Maitland, as we formed squadrons to attack a body of cavalry; "that column consists of at least fifteen hundred tried men, under the Count de Lusignan, and you have but five hundred——"

"True—but mine are *tried soldiers*," was the old man's proud reply; "soldiers *second to none* in Europe."

These were no vain words, for in less than two minutes, by one desperate charge, we had routed them.

The grenadiers of all corps had commenced the action, supported by us and other dragoons, but were repulsed. They rallied again, but were again driven back and forced to retire, under cover of several charges made by us and by the Black Hussars of Prussia.

"Well done, my own hussars—and well done the Scots Greys!" cried Prince Ferdinand, as we re-formed after a furious charge, without having a saddle emptied. "Colonel Preston, you ought to be proud of commanding such a regiment."

"*I am* proud," was the quiet reply of our old colonel.

In all this affair, our only loss was a single horse—mine, which was killed under me by a six-pound shot; but Prince Ferdinand was compelled to fall back, leaving five guns on the field, where the Prince of Ysembourg and two thousand of our soldiers were slain.

By this victory the French army was plentifully supplied with provisions of every kind, while we suffered greatly by the lack of food and forage. By it, also, their armies formed a junction and advanced together under the command of Maréchal de Contades, while Prince Ferdinand, with his British and Hanoverians, had to retire, leaving garrisons in Rothenburg, Munster, and Minden, to cover his retreat.

But vain were these precautions!



Rothenburg was surprised by the Duc de Broglie; his brother the Count de Broglie, and his nephew the Count de Bourgneuf, "with sixteen companies of grenadiers, one thousand four hundred infantry, the regiments of Schomberg, Nassau and Fischer," took Minden by assault, and found therein ninety-four thousand sacks of grain. Then Munster, though bravely defended by four thousand men, fell after a short but sharp siege. It was severely, I may say savagely, proposed by de Bourgneuf, to put all in Minden to the sword, on the plea that the garrison of a place taken by assault had no right to be received as prisoners of war; "but," as a newspaper informs us, "General Zastrow and his men owed their safety to the noble generosity of the Duke and Count de Broglie."

Considering the conquest of Hanover as certain, the court of Versailles was now occupied mainly by considering how that Electorate should be secured to France for the future, when we advanced to have a trial of strength with their armies on the glorious, and, to us, ever memorable plains of Minden.

Prior to this, my friend Tom Kirkton had been promoted to the rank of cornet and adjutant, for taking prisoner with his own hand, during our first charge at Bergen, the Comte de Lusignan, a Maréchal de Camp.

## CHAPTER II. THE TWO PRESENTIMENTS.

On the night before the action at Minden, while we were bivouacked in a wood near the bank of the Weser, there came under my observation two instances of that remarkable and undefinable emotion or foreboding termed presentiment; and I believe there are few men who have served a campaign without meeting with something of the kind among their comrades, though the dire foreboding may not always have been fulfilled.

One of these instances was the case of Lieutenant Keith of ours; the other was that of the aide-de-camp, Major Shirley.

Under a sheltering tree, and near a large watchfire, a few of our officers, among whom were Captain Douglas, Keith, Tom Kirkton, Dr. Probe, and myself, were making themselves as comfortable as our poor circumstances would admit. We had plenty of wine from the regimental sutler, "whose princely confidence" Kirkton ironically urged us not to abuse; we had plenty of brandy captured from a French caisson; we had water in plenty from a stream hard by; we had ration beef boiled in camp kettles; we had biscuits too; nor was Tom's usual song wanting on the occasion, and he trolled it so lustily that many of our men loitered near to hear him.

We were in high spirits with the expectation of meeting the French in the morning; young Keith alone was sad, melancholy, and silent, and it seemed to me that he drank deeply, an unusual circumstance with him. Then suddenly he appeared to reflect, and

ceasing his potations, resolutely passed alike the wine-jar and the cognac bottle.

"Are you ill, Keith?" asked Douglas, kindly.

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Tom Kirkton; "it is only the Westphalia wine that partially disagrees with him. Is it not so, friend Probe? Try some more brandy. I took it from a French baggage cart; 'tis the spoil of my sword and pistol. Come, Jamie Keith—

"How stands the glass around?  
For shame, ye take no care, my boys!"

But Keith shook his head and turned away.

"Pshaw, boy! don't imitate any virtue of the Spartans to-night," said Probe, our surgeon; "who can say that we shall all be together at this hour to-morrow?"

"Ah, who indeed!" muttered young Keith, with an air so melancholy that we all paused to observe him.

"Look at me, Keith," said Captain Douglas, gravely; "there is something wrong with you to-night."

"I grant you that there is," replied the young lieutenant, turning his pale and handsome face to the inquirer. "I have in my heart—and I cannot help telling you—a solemn presentiment that I shall not survive the battle of to-morrow. Yet observe me, gentlemen, observe me well and closely all of you, and see if I shall blench before the enemy, or belie the name of my forefathers."

With one voice we endeavoured to ridicule this unfortunate idea, or to wean him from it; but he only replied by sadly shaking his head. After a pause, he said—

"I trust that you will not laugh at what I am about to tell you; but indeed I care little whether you do so or not. An hour ago, after our halt, I fell asleep in my cloak at the foot of that tree, and while there I dreamed of my home, of my father's house at Inverugie. I saw the Ugie flowing between its banks of yellow broom, I heard the hum of the honeybee among the purple heather bells, while the sweet perfume of the hawthorn passed me on the wind. Then I heard the German Sea chafing on the sandy knowes in the distance, and all the sense of boyhood and of home grew strong within me. But when I looked towards our old hall of Inverugie, it was roofless and windowless, the long grass grew on its cold hearthstone, and there the nettle and the ivy waved in the wind, while the black gleds were building their nests by scores in the holes of the ruined wall; and that dream daunts me still.

"Why—why—what of it?" we asked together.

"Because when one of our family dreams of a gled the hour of death is nigh. I have never known it fail, and so it has been ever since Thomas the Rhymer sat on a block near the castle (to this day called the Tammas stane), and as a vision came before him, he stretched his hands towards the house, saying—

"When the gleds their nests shall build  
Where erst the Marischal hung his shield;  
*Then* Inverugie by the sea,  
Lordless shall thy lands be."

I am the last of the old line, and there is a conviction in my heart that the prophecy of the Rhymer is about to be fulfilled."

But for the well-known bravery, worth, and high spirit of the young subaltern, and the hereditary valour of the house he represented, we might have laughed at his strong faith in such an extremely old prediction—a faith in which, doubtless, his mother, his nurse, and many an old retainer had reared him; but as it was, we heard him in silence, till after a time, when Douglas endeavoured to reason with him on the folly of surrendering himself to such gloomy impressions, but in vain. His mind was sternly made up that he would fall on the morrow, and that he would die with honour to the attainted house he represented among us—the old lords of Inverugie and Dunotter, the earls marischal of Scotland.

While I was thinking of this—as we deemed it, fantastic idea—a hand was laid on my shoulder. I looked up and saw Major Shirley, who requested me to accompany him a little way apart. I could perceive by the light of the moon on one hand, and that of our watchfire on the other, that he was remarkably pale and somewhat agitated.

"Gauntlet," said he, with a smile, but with a very sickly one, "I have here a letter for you."

"From whom?"

"Your cousin; a letter which I quite forgot to deliver to you when I joined the army in Paderborn."

"This is somewhat odd—you forgot, eh?"

"Exactly; very awkward, is it not?"

"Rather," said I, somewhat ruffled. "Seven months have elapsed since you came from England, and you only remember it now! Do you recal that you stated she had not sent even a message to me?"

"Zounds! 'tis a fact, however odd," he replied, calmly, and in a very subdued voice. "I only bethought me to-night that the letter was in my dressing-case. We are to be engaged to-morrow; I may be knocked on the head as well as another, and thus have no wish to leave even the most trivial duty unfulfilled. You understand me?"

"Precisely," said I, with some contempt of manner.

"Here is your letter—adieu. I have an order for the Marquis of Granby. Where is his tent?"

"On the extreme right of the Inniskilling Dragoons."

"Good." He mounted and rode hurriedly away. I saw it all: this simpering staff officer was in love with Aurora, and dreaded in me a rival. Thus he had concealed the letter till his presentiment—shall I call *his* emotion apprehension?—of the coming day, impelled him to deliver it to me.

It was sealed and bordered with black. I tore it open and read hurriedly by the wavering light of our watchfire. The whole tenor of the letter was melancholy, and at such a time and under all the circumstances, it moved me, though one or two sentences were rather galling in their purport.

Aurora informed me that she had lost her mother at Tunbridge Wells on the day after we sailed. Save twice, and under rather

cloudy circumstances, I had never seen the good lady, and so I had no tears for the occasion.

"Dear cousin Basil," she continued, "my father is dead; my beloved mother is dead; my poor brother Tony and a little sister whom I loved dearly, are also dead: so I feel very lonely now. The loss of mamma has been my most severe calamity, for she was the person in whom all my thoughts, feelings, and anxieties centred. You are a soldier, and I know not whether you can feel like me—that each link of the loving chain as it breaks unites us closer, by near, dear, and mysterious ties, to those who are beyond the grave—the beloved ones who are gone, and to be with whom would be life in death. For a time after poor mamma left me I felt more a denizen of the world to come than of this, and I feel that though dead she can still strangely control or inspire my actions, my emotions, and my conduct here.

"Oh yes, Basil, when my poor mamma died I felt eternity *close* to me—I felt that the circumstance of her going *there* before me instituted a strange and endearing tie between me and that mysterious state of being; that my heart was drawn towards the land of spirits; that it yearned for the other world rather than to linger in this. (The deuce! thought I; is Aurora about to take the veil—or whence this sermon?)

"Excuse me, cousin, if I weary you with my sorrow; but to whom could I write of it, save you? You promised to write to me, but have never done so. How unkind, after all you have said to me! I am at present at Netherwood, where the autumn is charming, and as I write the sun is shining with a lovely golden gleam on the yellow corn-fields and on the blue wavy chain of the Cheviot Hills. We are cutting down a number of the old trees at Netherwood.

(Are we really! thought I.) Some of these are oaks that King James rode under on his way to Flodden Field; and dear old Mr. Nathan Wylie (Delightful old man!) recommends that the ruined chapel of St. Basil in the jousting-haugh should be removed as a relic of Popery, which stands in the way of the plough. But as the saint is a namesake of *yours*, it shall remain untouched, with all its ivy and guelder roses.

"When you return and visit us, as I trust in Heaven you shall (for I never omit to pray for your safety), you will find wonderful improvements in the kennels, stableyard, vinery, and copsewood."

It was very pleasant to me, a poor devil of a cornet, half-starved on my pay, especially since the capture of Minden, with its 94,000 sacks of grain, by Messieurs de Broglie and de Bourgneuf, to read how this lovely interloper and her crusty Mentor cut and carved on my lands and woods, kennels and stables.

"You will regret to hear that poor Mr. Wylie is failing fast, poor man! His niece Ruth—a very pretty young woman indeed—has just had twins. Her husband is Bailie Mucklewham, of the neighbouring town—a grave and rigid man, and ruling Elder of the Tabernacle, whatever that may be."

Ruth and her twins, and her husband the demure Elder and Bailie! I could laugh now, at the boyish hour in which I thought seriously of marrying Ruth Wylie.

"Doubtful where to address this letter to you, I have committed it to the care of Major Shirley, who has been hunting in this neighbourhood, and is now proceeding to Germany, to join the staff of my Lord George Sackville.



"P.S.—Write me, dear cousin, and tell me all about this horrible war, and if it will soon be over. The major is so impatient that I have not time to read over what I have written. Adieu, with a kiss, A.G."

In our comfortless bivouac, by the sinking light of the wavering watchfire, as I read on, Aurora's face came before me, so charming, so fair, so blooming, and so English. She was warmhearted, affectionate, and my only relative on earth, so could I think of her in such a time of peril otherwise than kindly?

"Can it be—I asked of myself—that I am forgetting Jacqueline? But wherefore remember her now!"

Shirley had been hunting in the vicinity of Netherwood, so I might be sure that all his time would not have been there devoted to the sports of the field. Aurora prayed for me! It was delightful to have some one at least who thought of me—whose friendship or regard blessed me and that my course in life was not unheeded or unmarked amid the perils of war.

Aurora might love me, if I wished; surely there was no vanity in me to think so? But I feared that I could never love her—at least as I had loved Jacqueline—for she was the holder, the usurper of all that should be mine.

I resolved to write to her kindly, affectionately, after the battle, and then I would think of her no more; but somehow Aurora's image was very persisting, and would not be set aside.

I put the letter in my sabretache, and was looking about for a soft place whereon to sleep for an hour or so, when the sharp twang of the trumpet sounding, and the voice of Tom Kirkton

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