

“ETHEL’S SIR LANCELOT.”

BY F. HODGSON.

EVERY girl within twenty miles of Craigmuir envied Ethel Cramer.

In the first place, she had plenty of money; in the second, she was very pretty and graceful; in the third, Craigmuir was one of the pleasantest estates in the beautiful mountain region of Pennsylvania; and in the fourth, Regie was so good-natured and handsome.

Craigmuir was Ethel’s home, and Regie (or more properly Reginald) was her brother, and acted as her guardian.

Of course, it was pleasant to be Ethel Cramer. There she lived at pretty, quaint Craigmuir, with its great sunny garden of flowers, its library of ancient books, a stable full of the finest horses, and the great chain of the broad mountain stretching in the distance. Could there possibly be anything more to wish for?

And then there was Reginald who loved her so, and was so proud of her, and who had been her playmate from babyhood upward, even though he was fifteen years her senior.

Certainly, Reginald Cramer was very fond of his graceful, dashing sister. Since her tenth year, her education and training had devolved entirely upon him; and to the best of his ability the good-natured fellow had done his duty by her. He had sent her to Paris to be “finished,” and supplied her with such wardrobes and *bon-bons* as incited her school companions to a perfect frenzy of envy.

After her education had been completed, he had traveled with her, giving her *carte-blanche* as regarded everything; and when her travels were ended, he had brought her home and installed her as mistress of Craigmuir. Since then pretty Ethel had reigned supreme as any young empress.

“Ethel is not like other girls,” her brother said, proudly—and certainly she was not. There was more of romance and love of daring in her temperament than characterizes the ordinary genus, young lady.

If Miss Cramer had a weakness, it certainly was hero-worship. In a certain charming style she believed implicitly in Jeannie D’Arc, and had quite a little craze on the subject of chivalry and the knights of the Round-Table. She had ransacked the library from top to bottom, searching for legends of brave knights and gallant

cavaliers. She had hung entranced over the stories of Sir Lancelot and his king, and fairly reveled in the great deeds perfected by the Gow Chrom and lordly Ivanhoe.

Reginald took great delight in what he called “Ethel’s heroics,” and laughed at them heartily; but Miss Ethel would shake her charming head with great gravity, remarking sagely,

“You may laugh as much as you please, Regie; but if I ever *do* fall in love, it will certainly be with a man who has done something.”

It was a dark, foggy morning, and Ethel had turned away from the dinner-table, and seated herself at her brother’s side for the purpose of cracking her nuts, and attending to his wants in a delightfully graceful and sisterly manner.

“He is what you girls would call handsome,” said Reginald, lazily, in reply to some question she had just asked him. “An almond, if you please.”

“But is he brave?” asked Ethel. “Has he ever done anything?”

“I don’t fancy he ever killed more than a hundred men at once,” said Reginald, with great solemnity, munching his nuts. “But still I don’t imagine he is secretly a coward; and as to the rest, I am compelled to say if he has ‘ever done anything,’ I have not heard of it as yet.”

Ethel gave her shoulders a little deprecating shrug, and looked into the fire, deciding that she should not like her brother’s friend. He was not a hero, and that was quite enough. She had entertained great hopes of Gordon Drasdyl, Regie was so fond of him, and, after all, he was only an ordinary, lazy man, with a handsome face, and the somewhat questionable reputation of being a “good fellow.”

“All men are alike now-a-days,” she said, as she stood before the mirror, a few hours after, brushing out her hair; “they all wear black coats and white neck-tyes, and do nothing. I wonder if there ever were Lancelots and King Arthurs!”

They were expecting Mr. Drasdyl to spend the autumn with them, and in the course of a few days he made his appearance.

He was a dandy, Ethel decided, looking at his large, handsome traveling-portmanteau, and he was decidedly lazy, for his servant followed,

carrying his cloak. He was a tall, well-proportioned man, with an aristocratic face, and a pair of large, handsome blue eyes, with a certain slow fire in them.

"I am glad to meet Cramer's sister," he said, taking her hand cordially. "I have known you by reputation ever since you were five years old, Miss Ethel."

And his even tenor voice was so pleasant in spite of its half indolent tone, that Ethel began to think that he might be a hero, after all.

Gordon Drasdyl was evidently determined to make friends with her, and before many days were over his determination was crowned with success. He agreed with Reginald that Ethel was unlike other girls. She was pretty and lady-like, and her little glows of romantic enthusiasm aroused him. He liked her affection for her brother, and admired her perfect good-breeding and refinement.

Ethel was a magnificent rider, and to Drasdyl this was a great attraction. It was something to dash over the October hills, with a spicy, elegant girl, and in such rides as these the two learned to appreciate each other highly.

But, notwithstanding her liking for him, Ethel had not changed her mind as to his laziness and non-heroism. Lazy he really must be, for his dapper-looking valet was his second presence; and heroic he could not be, for heroes (the Gow Chroms and Lancelots of Ethel's experience) never were indolent, and never wore unexceptionable cravats and well-fitting gloves. No, it was a great pity, but, really, Gordon Drasdyl was not a hero.

"I wish I had been born a man," said Miss Cramer, one evening.

Gordon Drasdyl had been lounging back in his chair, watching her as she sat in the fire-light. He had come to the conclusion that Miss Cramer was excessively pretty long ago; but this evening her clear, gray eyes were so very bright, the glow on her cheek so very brilliant, and the short, bronze curls so coquettishly becoming, that he decided, if such a thing were possible, Miss Cramer was improving.

"Why and wherefore?" he asked, smilingly.

Reginald laughed.

"Ethel has a weakness for heroes, Drasdyl," he said; "she believes in Knights of the Round-Table and the days of the Crusades."

Drasdyl looked amused.

"Do you want to 'ride abroad redressing human wrong?' or does your ambition point toward the Red Cross Knight, Miss Ethel?"

She shook her head.

"If I were a man," she said, "I should like

to feel that I had made some use of my manhood. I should like to do something more than hunt, and ride, and dress. But the world is too rich in this generation to afford other than idle gentlemen."

Her tone was a little warm, for, to tell the truth, she hoped to rouse him.

But he only smiled again, somewhat quizzically at her hit at his own weakness.

"And so you think we are too idle to be brave? Does that amount to an accusation of cowardice?"

She knew he was jesting, but her color rose nevertheless.

"No; merely inertness. I want more of spirit, and less of fashionable inactivity."

"I wish I were a hero for your sake," he said; and there the subject dropped.

But in a few days after it was discussed again, though under very different circumstances.

It was in the course of one of the long rides they were in the habit of taking—a farewell ride Gordon called it, for he was to return home the following day, and was not a little dispirited at the prospect.

"It will be so dull," he said. "What a pity it is that all pleasure must come to an end."

"But how can it be dull?" asked Miss Cramer, innocently. "Chattersley is a very charming place, I hear."

Drasdyl was silent a moment. He was thinking very deeply on the subject of the speech he intended to make. It was rather a task, but he managed it at last in a very creditable manner.

"Craigmuir is a charming place," he said; "but what would Craigmuir be without Ethel?" She laughed a little musical laugh.

"I don't know. But you see I belong to Craigmuir; and Regie——"

They had been riding slowly, and as she finished speaking, Drasdyl laid his hand upon her bridle.

"Why not belong to Chattersley and Gordon? My dear little Ethel, I want you."

The smile died out of her face.

"I am very sorry——" she began, and then, seeing his pained face, stopped.

There was an embarrassed pause, during which he held her bridle silently; then she began again, speaking hurriedly,

"I ought to tell you the truth," she said, impulsively. "If I were less your friend I should be less frank. I have said that the man who is my husband shall have made good use of his life. Gordon, what use have you made of yours?"

She might have been very much mistaken:

but certainly she was very much in earnest, and seeing it, Gordon's face saddened.

"And you cannot trust me, Ethel?"

"It is not that," she answered, with heightened color. "I think you understand my meaning."

They rode on in silence for awhile, and then Gordon spoke again. Notwithstanding his seeming listlessness, he knew more of the world than she did, and saw how easy it was for a romantic, enthusiastic girl to be led away by her romance and enthusiasm. Perhaps, in spite of his disappointment, he was a little amused at her fervor.

"And so you refuse me because I am not a Sir Lancelot, Ethel?"

She turned her face away with quite a resolute air. His great blonde mustache was curving mischievously.

"Is that fair?" he asked again.

The white temples under the coquettish riding-cap deepened from pink to rose, but Miss Cramer had nothing to say. Speaking truly, she felt somewhat nettled at his evident amusement, and seeing it, Drasdyl became good-naturedly silent.

When they reached home, after helping her to dismount, Gordon lingered at the door awhile to give some directions to his groom, so that Ethel entered the dining-room before him. It was empty, Regie had gone out; and presently she heard Drasdyl's spurs ringing as he came up the hall, singing a fragment of "*Com e gentil*." He certainly did not look like a rejected lover as he opened the door. He was smiling, and the handsome eyes were so good-humoredly pleasant, that Ethel felt rather as though she were the embarrassed party.

He came to the fire, and, leaning one elbow on the mantle-piece, looked down at her.

"I am going to ask you a favor, Ethel."

"What is it?"

"Promise me that you will not let my presumption interfere with our friendship. If you don't want to marry me, that is no reason why we should not be the best of friends. Is it an agreement?"

It would have been a sheer impossibility to resist his unembarrassed frankness, and Miss Cramer never attempted impossibilities; so she put her small hand into his big one, and allowed him to grasp it with quite a cordial pressure.

"Now I must go and change my dress," she said.

"But there is something else."

She had crossed the room, and turned her

head, with her hand still resting on the handle of the door, glancing at him inquiringly.

"When you have found your Sir Lancelot, promise that you will tell me."

The door swung open, and then closed with a little snap. Miss Cramer had gone without the promise, and our hero was left alone to his meditations. When Regie returned, he found him still in the room, apparently enjoying himself with the help of a bright fire, an easy-chair, and a great Turkish chibouque, which was his special weakness.

"I am not going back to Chattersley to-morrow," he said, after Regie was supplied with like luxuries, and they had puffed away a few minutes in silence.

"All the better. What made you change your mind?"

"I asked Ethel to marry me this evening," puff—puff; "and she said no. I am going to wait until she says yes."

"Holloo!" exclaimed Reginald. "Don't she love you?"

"My dear fellow," between a series of puffs, "I am not a hero. I never killed a dozen men because they thought their sweet-hearts were superior to mine. I never 'rode abroad redressing human wrongs.' I stayed at home and minded my own business, though. I think when I have met with a scoundrel who needed chastisement, I have generally supplied him with the article *ad libitum*. Ethel is a dear little girl, and her dear, little, warm heart has set her judgment on fire and made her somewhat unjust. Apart from that, I think she likes me, so I am not disconsolate; and if I have your consent, I will sing *nil desperandum*. Hand us the Bordeaux, my boy."

The Bordeaux was handed, and taking his chibouque from his mouth for the purpose, Cramer regarded his friend with an admiring glance.

"You have my consent," he said, "and you have plenty of pluck. You may not be a Sir Lancelot, Drasdyl; but I think you are safe."

I will not profane to say whether Ethel was pleased or displeased, when at dinner Gordon announced his intention of remaining. Young ladies faces are not supposed to tell tales, and Miss Cramer only smiled, and ate her salmon in silence.

Two weeks passed, and Drasdyl was still at Craigmuir. He was pleasant and jovial as ever. He shot with Regie, and rode with Ethel; he listened to her music, and added a magnificent bass to her singing; he consulted with her gravely about her aquarium; and sympathized

with her when the big fish ate up the minnows; in fact, he did everything but make love; and really in those days Ethel began to doubt whether he had ever done that at all. Another man, under such circumstances, would have been apt to make himself a bore; but this gentleman had too much good taste and balance to err on the side of sentimentality. Perhaps on some very rare occasions the love songs were sung *con espressione*—but that was all; and even then they were generally ended with such comical parodies as made the expression somewhat questionable. For two weeks, as I have said, this went on, and was very amusing; but on the third week Ethel found her Sir Lancelot.

Craigmuir was in a mining district, and the nearest village was populated by miners, who worked in the coal-mines. The principal shaft was usually known by the name of the Devil's Mouth, and for some time had been in a very dangerous condition. Once or twice the workmen had been warned, by falling stone and rubbish, that it was unsafe; but day by day it had been neglected, until at last it was absolutely perilous.

One evening, Ethel, her brother, and her guest, were sitting together round the fire, when one of the servant's rushed into the room in horrible excitement,

- "It's gone at last," she said. "Oh, Lord! Mr. Cramer, part of the Devil's Mouth has fallen in, and there are, at least, fifty men buried alive."

The two gentlemen were on their feet in an instant, and had left the house.

For awhile Ethel could only ask questions, and pace the floor in a restless terror; but at last she stopped calmer with a new resolution.

"Let me have the carriage at once," she said, to the servant; "and tell the housekeeper to provide some coverings, and prepare to go with me to the mine."

Her commands were obeyed, and by the time the carriage was brought she was ready to enter it. Arriving at the shaft, she found it necessary to order the driver to stop. Around the pit's mouth were crowded the wives, mothers, and children of the miners, kneeling, praying, screaming, and wailing, wringing their hands and beating their breasts. Women with babies in their arms, and little children clinging to them; old women sobbing over their sons; sisters wailing for their brothers. Fifty—some crushed, some buried alive. Ethel leaned back against the cushions of her carriage and burst into tears; but after awhile she looked up again. She could see Regie in the crowd—and, yes,

there was Gordon. She bent forward eagerly, she had never seen the man's face in such a glow of energy before. He had thrown off his coat, and was working with the might of a lion; his supple strength stood him in good stead. He could lift as much as three men; and his rich, powerful voice was heard issuing cool, quick orders on all sides. He seemed to inspire the people with hope and courage; and even the weeping women stayed their cries to look at him and wonder at his calmness.

At last there rose a shout. In falling, a great rock had been held by the side of the shaft, and had prevented its being filled more than a few yards. By the side of this rock there was a space large enough to admit of a man swinging himself down by means of a rope. Once below, he might learn the extent of the injury done, and assist the living men to ascend. Who would go? Women hushed their weeping and hid their faces. Who would go? Men turned pale, and looked into each other's eyes with a fearful questioning.

"It is almost certain death," said an old miner. "The rock may hold on, or it may fall—the Lord Almighty only knows which it will do! You see it has prevented much rubbish dropping, and the damage is not so great as we imagined. There are not many workers in the mine, and if the rock holds, the man who goes down may save them all; if it falls—" the old man took off his hat, and his voice sunk, "God have mercy on his soul!"

There was a dead, dead silence. Ah! to the bravest of us the gift of life is very dear.

But at last the silence was broken by a man stepping into the circle. He took off the coil of rope and began to unwind it.

"Fifty lives to one," he said, in a steady, rich voice; "and these poor fellows have wives and sisters. If the rock holds, I save them; if it falls—" he ended reverently in the words of the old miner, "the Lord have mercy on my soul!"

Ethel had looked up at the first ring of the deep voice. Who was it? It was the man whom she had accused of being useless and listless, the man of whom she had said, "He is no hero"—it was Gordon Drasdyl.

"Hold tightly to the rope," he said. "I have climbed the rigging of a man-of-war, and I am not afraid of the depth. Cramer," his face was pale, but he was quite calm and collected, "if the worst comes to the worst, do not forget my message. Now, boys!"

A step, and he was swinging by the rope—lower, lower, as the men paid it out. Nearing

the rock—close to it—passing it now, and they see the handsome cavalier-face turned a little upward, and the handsome eyes darkened with something which was not fear; only a solemn thought, as the blue sky is lost to his sight.

The women dropped upon their knees, praying aloud, and the men took off their caps. Ethel watched the rope with a horrid fascination as it slid through the hands of the holders.

Five minutes, and the strain ceased—he had reached the bottom. Then another silence, and after that a shout of triumph. Some one was holding the rope again, and at length a deathly-faced boy was landed safely at the top.

"Only one killed!" he said; "and we think the rock will hold awhile. The gentleman is helping the men up one by one. He says he will wait until the last."

Was he a hero?

They were drawn up one after another. Men with rigid faces and eyes hollow with fear; boys with hardly the power to raise themselves. One by one—one by one; Ethel thought it would never end. Forty, forty-one, forty-two—she could not count longer. She hid her face in the cushions and waited.

"Only one more," she heard a voice say at last, "and he is the gentleman; but, masters, the rock has stirred."

Fresh workers crowded to the pit's mouth, and the rope was lowered again.

"It must have reached the bottom," said one, "but he's not holding it."

"He was most worn out," said the man who last came up. "He had helped us all, and it was hard work; but he wouldn't come until he had seen the last of us up; he said there maybe little sisters waiting at the top who loved us."

Was he a hero?

At last, at last he was holding to the rope, and they drew it slowly and cautiously. Two, three, four minutes, five, and the strong hands were above the rock, but their veins were knotted and starting; and as the man's face

rose to view they saw his eyes were closed, and that his lips were bitten purple.

A stir, a bustle, a wild, triumphant shout, pealing and ringing to the very sky, and Ethel's carriage had drawn nearer.

"Put him in here," she said. "Give him some wine, Regie. Oh, Gordon, Gordon!" And when they laid him on the seat, she drew his brave, noble head upon her lap, smoothing the heavy hair back, and chafing the swollen hands in her own, and then, to Regie's great amazement, she bent and kissed him.

She would not let Regie move him; his head must rest there; and there it rested until they reached the house. It was not long before he was conscious, and then Ethel piled cushions for him on the sofa, and insisted on bringing his tea to him with her own pretty hands.

Before the evening was over, Regie very considerably found business which needed his presence in the village; and as he left the room, Miss Cramer, who had been sitting in silence for some time, looking thoughtfully into the fire, rose from her chair and crossed to the prostrate hero's side, evidently with a purpose.

"I have something to tell you," she said, in a pretty little glow of enthusiastic penitence. "I said you were not a hero. I was very unjust and foolish. Please, won't you shake hands with me, and be friends?"

He was stretched all his magnificent six feet length, and he looked up at her tenderly. Shake hands? Of course he would. He shook both hands, and then insisted on holding them and drawing Miss Ethel into a chair at his side.

"Do you mean that I am a hero?" he said, with a quiet smile. "Ethel, Regie says that you kissed me this evening—did you?"

She blushed brightly, but her answer was characteristically pretty and frank.

"I think I did. I had been watching you all the time, Gordon, and when they laid you in the carriage, I knew that I had found my Sir Lancelot at last."

THE DEAD RETURN NO MORE.

BY ALEXANDER A. IRVINE.

The living part, but meet again,
To talk their absence o'er,
And smile to think of perils past—
The dead return no more.

When angry words have broken troth
With those who've loved before,
There's hope that they may meet again—
The dead return no more.

We wrong our friends, and they forgive;
But vainly we implore,
When there's a grave that lies between—
The dead return no more!

Oh! weary life! Oh! happy souls,
Safe on the further shore,
Thank God! to storms and shipwreck here
The dead return no more.