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THE FORT

Little remains of the old fort to tell of the mighty stronghold that once commanded the hill. A few great boulders piled up to face the sunset—and Nature's record is ended. There they stand—lonely gray old sentinels, watching again and again the rosy hue of day pale into twilight; even as those few lonely old men in gray seem ever to see anew the rosy glow of their hopes fade into the pallor of failure and despair.

Just so brief is the record in the pages of History. Half a dozen lines of printer's ink, a few dim pictures in the mind of an old soldier—and there, too, the story ends.

We are told that on September 18, 1861, Brigadier-General Simon Bolivar Buckner, under orders from General Albert Sidney Johnston, entered Bowling Green with a force of some four thousand men. On the 28th of October General Johnston took command of the army, which numbered at that time about twenty thousand. Under the direction of these generals, the fortifications were begun which won for Bowling Green the name of "The Gibraltar of the West." Of the engineer who planned the fort we know nothing but the name—Noyette.

Through the cold, dreary months of winter the soldiers toiled there, endeavoring to make their position impregnable, and their hold firm on Kentucky's soil. But as they entered upon the new year they saw the hard-won security slipping from their powerless hands. After the fall of Fort Henry, when the attack on Fort Donelson was seen to be inevitable, the want of soldiers made untenable the position of Bowling Green, and necessitated its evacuation. So, literally burning
their bridges behind them, the Confederates retreated, the last
troops withdrawing as the shells from the Federal guns, stationed
across the river, burst over the town--February 14, 1862.

Later, the fort was completed and occupied by the
Federals under the command of Benjamin Harrison, then Colonel of the
Seventy-fifth Indiana Infantry; and as a Federal stronghold bore the
name of Fort Lytle.

Cold and harsh seem these facts as the rough gray
stones of the fort; as pitifully inadequate to express this living
page of History as is the crumbling wall to express the might and
power of the one-time stronghold. But as nature has sent forth
clinging vines, so must we with our imagination, garland these stern
facts with life and meaning. We must picture the fort in all its old-
time grandeur and people it with the men in gray, ever toiling for the
cause nearest to their hearts; we must see their faces, glowing with
hope, and courage, and faith; we must feel their sufferings and joys,
their loves and hates, their passions and desires, and, at last, the
blackness of their despair, as, in long gray lines, they leave behind
the work into which has entered a part of their very lives. Our hearts
must beat fast again with the quick step of the victorious army in
blue, as it, too, climbs this fortified hill, and experience their
thrill of triumph as they name it as their own.

All this we must re-live, and even then we will not
have caught its deepest meaning. The years have softened the bold
face of the fortress; the music of many happy voices has driven away
the thunderous echo of the guns; and peace broods over the ground
once darkly shadowed by the wings of war. So must we, in our
imagining, see gray coat merged with blue; feel hate, love, joy, sorrow,
hope, despair, defeat and victory mingled in one great love and unity as we bow our heads in reverence before Old Glory waving far above this scene of civil strife.

Only then can we read aright the history of the old fort.