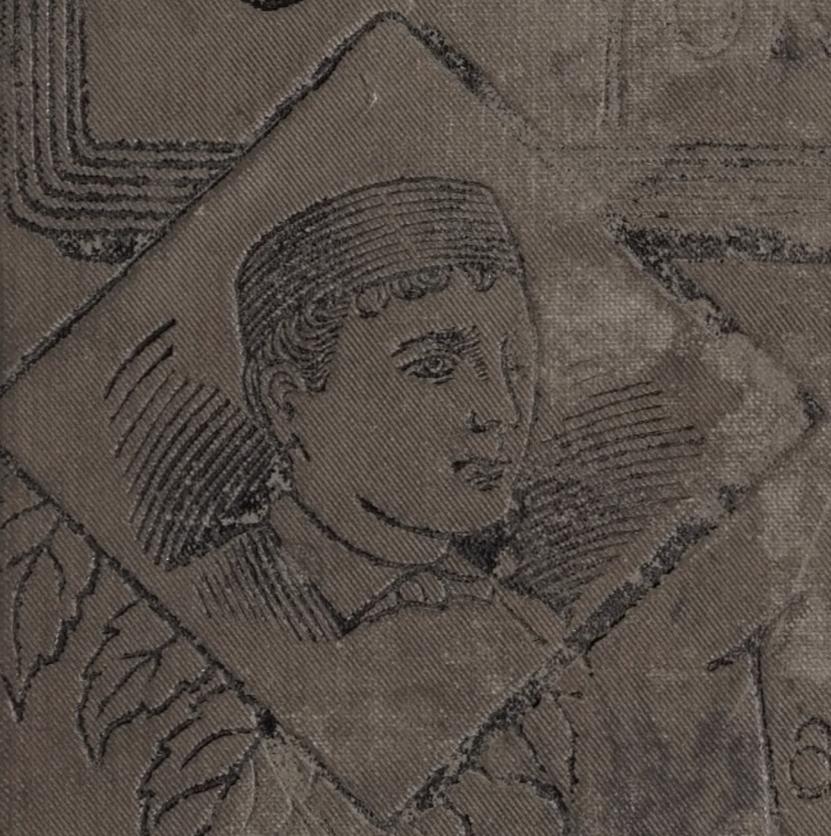
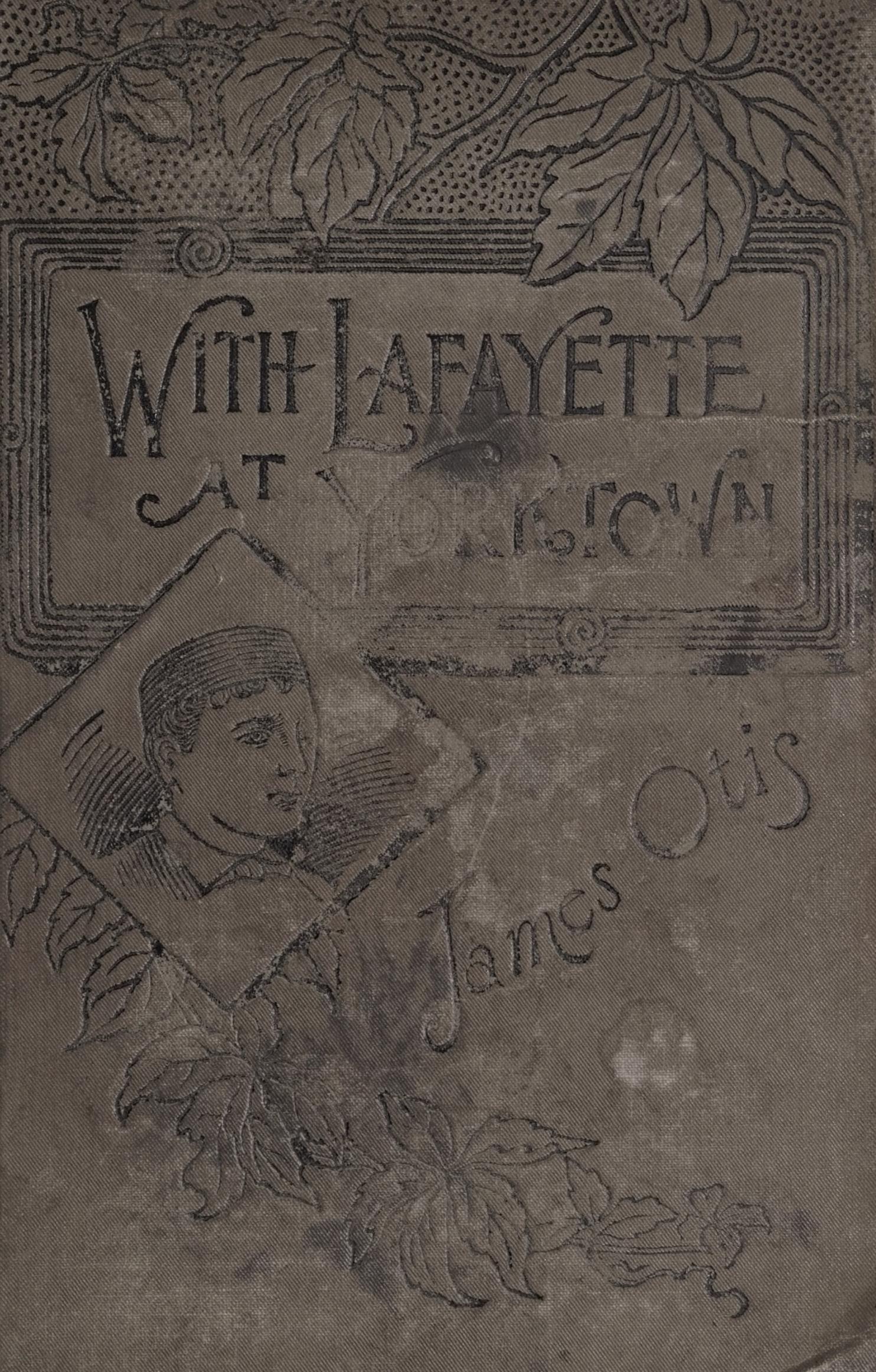


WITH LAFAYETTE
AT YORKTOWN



James Otis



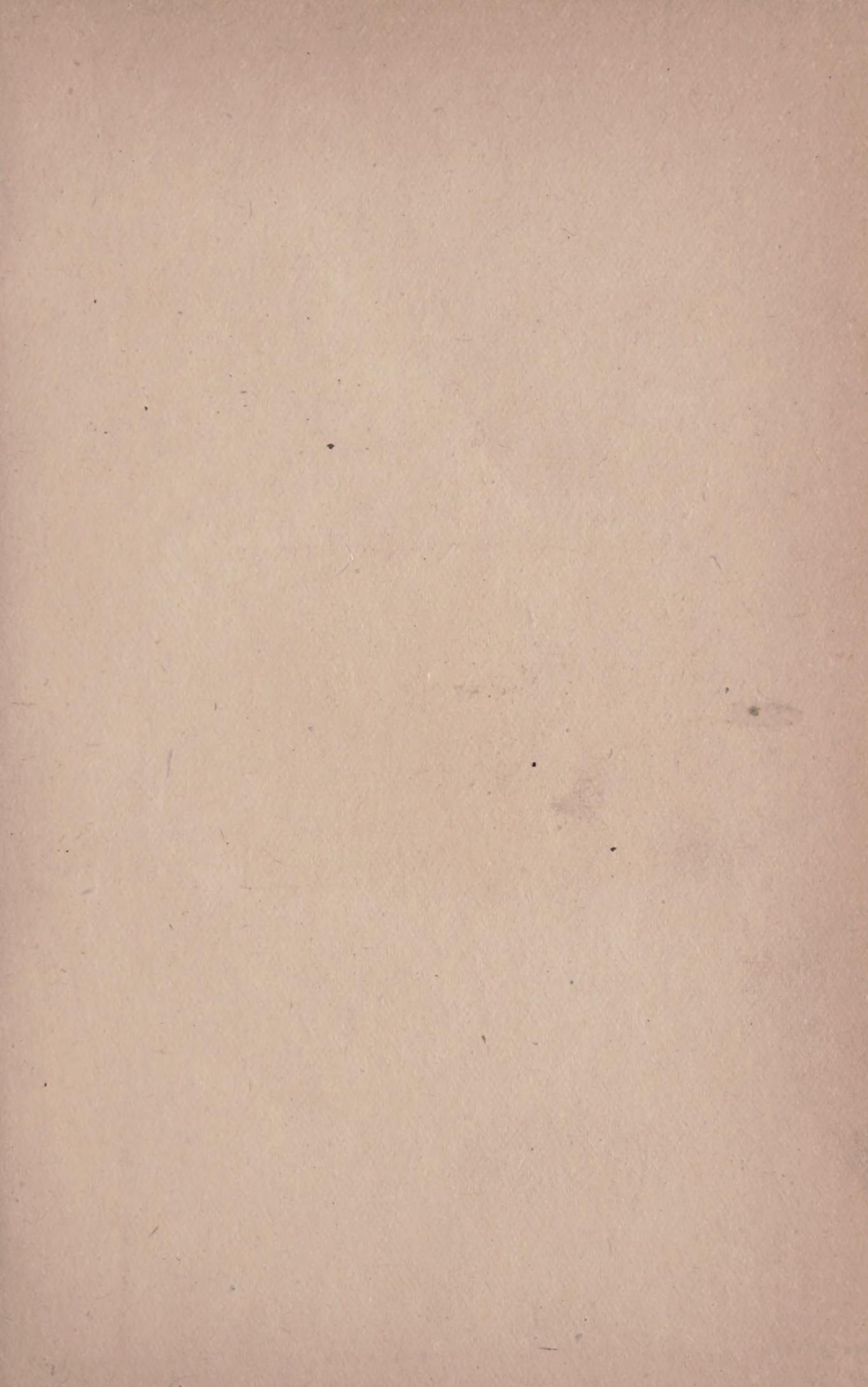
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“Make a single move and I’ll shoot you,” Josh cried in a loud voice. “Drop the oars and hold up your hands.”—Page 202.

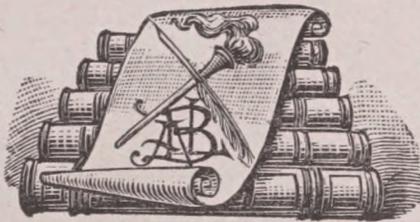
WITH LAFAYETTE

AT YORKTOWN.

A Story of How Two Boys Joined the
Continental Army.

By JAMES OTIS,

*Author of "The Search for the Silver City," "The Castaways,"
"A Runaway Brig," "The Treasure Finders," etc., etc.*



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WITH LAFAYETTE AT YORKTOWN.

CHAPTER I.

A SUDDEN DETERMINATION.

“COME with me, Ned! Why should we stay here in Portsmouth when there are good opportunities for fellows to carve their way in the world?”

“I don’t object, providing I can do all the carving, Ben Jaffreys; but it sometimes happens, as Sam Foulsham learned, that others get the best chance in that line, and I hardly fancy being the subject of such an operation.”

“One would believe you were a coward.”

“Perhaps I am.”

“But it so happens I know better. There’s not another in the province of New Hampshire I would ask to join me in this enterprise——”

“Perhaps that is because there’s no one else who would go on a wild-goose chase as quickly as I.”

“You do not name it correctly. Why should there be anything wild in the idea of joining the

Continental Army? We are over sixteen years of age——”

“You have passed it by two months, and I, exactly five days.”

“We are old enough to be accepted as soldiers at all events, and now is surely the time when men are most needed.”

“I should say they were, otherwise General Clinton will declare the war at an end because there are no more rebels to be killed.”

“Don’t make sport of a serious matter, Ned. This is a grave subject for you and I.”

“There can be no question about that,” Ned Allen replied with a hearty laugh, “and as for seriousness, why more couldn’t be crowded into the proposition. As if it was the most simple matter possible, you suggest that we travel on foot——”

“You own a horse, and so do I,” Ben interrupted.

“We have the use of two poor ones, I’ll admit; but whether my uncle will care to have his horse left where the chances are he’ll never see the beast again, remains to be proven. But to outline the scheme: You say you intend to make your way from here to the Hudson River, overland, and, from whatever point you strike there, sail down to the headquarters of the army, for the purpose of enlisting. Why take so long and dangerous a journey? Soldiers are needed here, or in Massachusetts. Why not enlist at home?”

“And do nothing more gallant than join in the squabble about boundary lines! I want to accom-

plish something, and what better chance could possibly be offered than under Colonel Scammell, whom we both know so well?"

"I *would* like to serve with him," Ned said half to himself.

"Then start with me to-morrow morning. There is no reason why you need say a word to any one. Mother is willing I should go——"

"Because your father is in the light infantry, and you would be with him if you joined Colonel Scammell's forces."

"Very true. Your uncle would be opposed to your going, because he hopes the king can yet reduce us to subjection, therefore it will be all right for you to leave secretly."

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow at daybreak. Will you come?"

It is more than probable Ned Allen would have turned a deaf ear to the proposition just made by his friend had he not been so unhappy at home. Both his parents were dead, and he had been unwillingly admitted as a member of his uncle's family, a fact of which he was frequently reminded.

This was not the first time the two boys had discussed the question of enlisting in the Continental Army; but when the matter had been mentioned previously, neither were of lawful age to become soldiers, and their conversation was confined to "what they wanted to do," while now they were comparatively at liberty to follow their own inclinations.

It was quite natural Ben should be eager to enlist in Colonel Scammell's New Hampshire regiment, because his father was an officer of that organization; but Ned had doubts of their ability to make the journey successfully, owing to lack of money and ignorance regarding such sections of the country as it would be necessary to traverse.

"It seems to me you should be able to make up your mind in less time than you are taking," Ben said impatiently, as his friend stood revolving the matter in his mind. "You have often said you would enlist when you were old enough, and——"

"I am not hesitating because I am undecided whether I will be a soldier; but questioning if it will be possible to make our way from here to the Hudson River."

"You will never know until you try."

"That is true, and I reckon we'll make the attempt. If we don't find Colonel Scammell, I can enlist in Boston, which will prevent the necessity of coming back here again."

"Then you agree to join me?" Ben cried joyfully.

"I will be at your house before daylight."

"Why not come now, and stay all night?"

"Because uncle would miss me just so much the sooner. If he had an idea of what we propose to do, I shouldn't be allowed to even show my nose out of doors for the next week. You must provide all the provision; I will be on hand with my equipments and the horse, but nothing more."

“There shan’t be anything lacking; I’ll go and tell mother, so she can make some arrangements for your comfort. To-morrow is the second day of August——”

“In the year 1781,” Ned added with a laugh.

“I wasn’t trying to set the date down in my mind; but only mentioned the fact to get some idea of when we should arrive at headquarters. We ought not to be more than ten days on the road.”

“If we get there in two months I shall think we’re doing fairly well. It can’t be less than three hundred miles.”

“Not more, and we should be able to ride thirty miles each day without hurrying the horses.”

“I reckon mine can manage to travel that far every twenty-four hours,” Ned replied with a laugh, and then he turned away suddenly, for his uncle could be seen coming up the street as if in search of some one.

“The old tory !” Ben muttered, as the gentleman in question passed him without a salutation. “How he would rave if he knew what Ned had agreed to do! He won’t find out until it is too late, though, and by this time to-morrow we shall be so far away pursuit will be useless.”

Then he went home to tell his mother he had been successful in his mission, which had had no other purpose than to persuade Ned to join him in the long journey.

Nearly every one in Portsmouth knew Ben

Jaffreys intended to enlist in Colonel Scammell's light infantry as soon as he was sixteen years of age, and the remainder of this last day at home would have been spent in taking leave of his friends, but for the necessity of secrecy on Ned's account.

Therefore it was that Ben and his mother refrained from making mention of the important fact that New Hampshire's quota of men was to be increased by two, and at an hour before daylight on the morning after Ned's sudden determination to enlist he was at his friend's home as nearly ready for the journey as was possible.

Mrs. Jaffreys had cooked as large a store of provisions as the two boys could carry conveniently, and when this supply was exhausted they would be forced to depend for supplies upon the country through which they passed.

The leave-takings were not prolonged. Half an hour after Ned arrived the two boys were riding rapidly in the direction of Keene, although the sun had not yet shown himself.

"It's lucky your uncle didn't suspect anything," Ben said when they were several miles from the town, and the horses were checked to a slow trot.

"He'll be in fine humor when he discovers that I have not only run away, but taken the horse with me. I shouldn't be surprised if he would try to have me arrested for stealing."

"Much benefit that will be after you have enlisted."

"It is a good deal like turning my back on home

forever," and Ned gave vent to a long-drawn sigh. "I haven't had it so very comfortable since I lived with uncle; but Portsmouth is home, and the time must come when I shall want to go back."

"Don't worry about that at this early day. Once we join the army it will be to remain in it as long as we are alive and needed, and when we come home your uncle may have different ideas."

"The last will never come about unless General Washington succeeds in whipping the Britishers."

"And don't you believe that will happen?" Ben asked, surprised at the tone of his companion's voice.

"I can't say it looks very much that way just now. Our forces are being beaten on every hand, and since more are killed than enlist, it can only be a question of time when General Washington will find himself without men."

"Now you are talking like your uncle."

"Suppose I am, it doesn't prove that I'm inclined to be a tory. A person who won't see matters as they really exist must be an idiot. We know Clinton has the whip-hand of General Washington just now, and it doesn't need that one should be a philosopher in order to understand what the end will be unless there is soon a change for the better."

"Why are you willing to enlist if you believe the Continental Army is so nearly wiped out of existence?"

"Because this is the time when soldiers are most needed. If every white man in the colonies between the ages of sixteen and sixty would come forward

in these dark days, there would soon be a change in affairs. I should be ashamed to remain at home when it was possible, as now, to enlist."

Ben did not continue the conversation. He had never considered the situation of affairs so desperate for the Continental Army as his friend pictured it, and for the first time, perhaps, began to have doubts of the final result.

These gloomy forebodings were soon banished from his mind, however, by the exhilaration of the morning ride. The sun had risen, all nature was rejoicing in the birth of another day, and he could not remain insensible to the beauties of the scenery.

During three hours the two rode on in silence, and then, having arrived at a small stream which crossed the road at a point where the shade of a heavy growth of timber offered relief from the now fervid rays of the sun, Ned proposed that they halt for a short time.

"We shall cover more ground if the horses are not pushed rapidly. We, as well as they, will be none the worse for a second breakfast, and I propose it be eaten here."

Ben was perfectly willing to dismount, and soon the two were lying under the trees while their horses cropped the luxuriant grass which grew by the side of the road.

For at least the tenth time that morning they discussed the route to be pursued after arriving at Keene, and then both relapsed into silence born of a knowledge of the dangers which might be encountered before they were with the army.

Half an hour had passed since they dismounted, and Ben was on the point of suggesting that the journey be resumed, when Ned suddenly started up in the attitude of one who listens intently.

“What is the matter?” Ben asked in a whisper.

“Can’t you hear the hoof-beats of horses?”

“Yes,” Ben replied after a brief pause. “There is nothing in such a sound to alarm us, for it is likely there are more than we who are traveling to-day.”

“*You* have no cause for fear, but with me it is different.”

“Now don’t be foolish, Ned! There isn’t one chance in a thousand your uncle will suspect what has been done until we are so far away that pursuit will be useless.”

“This may be the thousandth chance, and there is no reason why we should stay here any longer. The horses are in good condition, and we may as well push on.”

As he spoke Ned went toward the animals, walking so rapidly that they started slowly down the road, unwilling to bring their meal to so speedy an end.

“Be careful, or we shall have a fine chase after them!” Ben cried. “Better let me catch mine first; he is accustomed to have me walk up to him.”

Ned’s steed was the more spirited of the two, and his owner soon realized that it would be well to act upon his friend’s suggestion.

It was not a simple matter to catch either of the

animals, and Ben did not succeed in gaining a hold upon his bridle until the approaching horsemen appeared in view.

Then he cried sharply :

“Look out, Ned! It *is* your uncle!”

The warning came too late.

Ben seized the rein of his friend's horse at the same moment Jacob Downs dashed up, halting in front of his nephew.

“Running away to become a soldier, eh?” the angry man cried as he swung his whip viciously, missing Ned's cheek by less than an inch. “So you have turned thief in addition to your other misdeeds?”

“What have I stolen?” and the boy screened himself from the threatened attack by stepping behind Ben.

“Whose horse is that?”

“Yours, of course.”

“Then you must have stolen him, otherwise he would now be in my stable.”

“I have had your permission to use him, as every one in Portsmouth who knows you can testify.”

“It is well understood that you were to use him only at home! Give me the bridle; I will take my property back, and as for you, go your way; I wash my hands of all responsibility in the matter.”

“I will not give you the bridle, for it, as well as the saddle, is my own, bought with money I have earned,” Ben said stoutly as he stepped to the horse's head, where he stood ready to defend his own.

“Anything you may have earned belongs to me, and if it was of ten times the value I should not be repaid for what I have spent in your behalf!” the enraged man cried as he urged his steed forward, regardless of the fact that he was riding Ben down.

“Watch your chance and get away while I do what I can to hinder him,” Ben whispered to his friend, and in a louder tone he added to Mr. Downs. “Be careful, sir, or you will do me some harm. Keep back, for you are no uncle of mine, and even if you were I would protect myself!”

The boy raised his whip threateningly, causing the horse ridden by Mr. Downs to leap back against the two who had accompanied the gentleman in his pursuit.

Leaning well forward in his saddle, the angry man aimed a blow with his whip at Ben, and his horse, now thoroughly alarmed, wheeled suddenly, throwing the rider to the ground.

“Now is your chance, Ned!” Ben cried excitedly. “Don’t waste an instant!”

The path was so narrow that those in the rear could not come forward without risk of doing some injury to the dismounted man, who had fallen so heavily that it was impossible to regain his feet quickly, and Ned would not have a better opportunity if he was willing to escape on what would now be considered by every one as a stolen horse.

He did not stop to speculate upon the consequences of such a course; but, intent only on flight, obeyed his friend’s command.

Leaping into the saddle, he urged his horse on at full speed, and Ben followed before Mr. Downs had recovered from the effects of his fall.

“Keep straight on,” Ben shouted when they had fairly started. “It would be foolish to turn aside while they are so close behind.”

The horses were comparatively fresh, thanks to the long halt, and needed but little urging to press madly on, regardless of the low-hanging bushes which oftentimes threatened to brush the riders from the saddles.

While one might have counted five the boys heard no sound from the rear, and then came angry cries, mingled with the thud of horses' feet, telling that Ned's uncle was not willing to admit himself beaten until after a severe struggle.

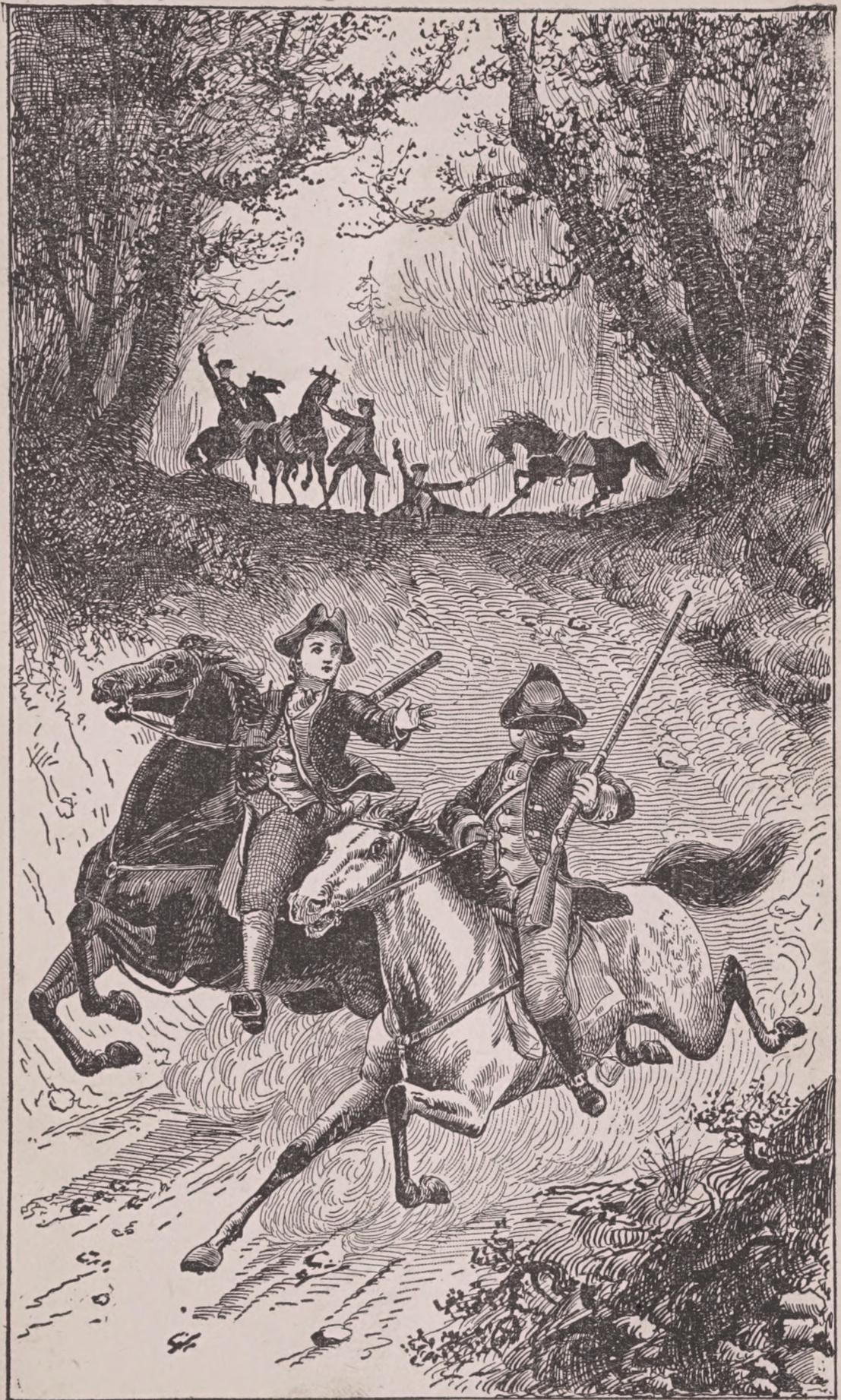
“We can give them the slip if we favor the animals,” Ben shouted. “Don't press your horse too hard at first, and we shall win the race!”

“Now that I have really turned thief I am bound to escape, no matter what happens,” Ned replied despondently, urging his steed to renewed exertions.

“You are nothing of the kind,” Ben cried angrily. “There isn't a man or boy in Portsmouth who would have done differently under the circumstances.”

Ben used his whip until he was where he could lay his hand on his companion's arm, and then said soothingly :

“Do as I propose, Ned. Keep the animals well



Leaping into the saddle Ned urged his horse on at full speed and Ben followed before Mr. Downs had recovered from his fall.—Page 12.

in hand to prevent their being blown, and we shall escape with but little trouble. Above all things, don't let what he said cause you to admit being a thief, for you are not. He couldn't have taken the horse back without a bridle, and he intended to deprive you of both saddle and bridle, which are yours, no matter if he has provided you with food."

"I have earned everything I ever received from Jacob Downs!"

"We all know that, and there isn't a person in Portsmouth who will say you have done wrong in taking the horse. Don't bother with such thoughts; but think only of giving him the slip, which can't be done if we ride at this mad pace. Pull up a bit, and take it more leisurely."

Ned suffered himself to be guided by his friend, and soon the two were traveling at such a pace as only sufficed to keep them a short distance in advance of their pursuers.

CHAPTER II.

A SUSPICIOUS ACQUAINTANCE.

UNTIL the encounter with his uncle, Ned Allen had been in the highest spirits; but now he was most despondent. The idea that he had been charged with stealing was sufficient to rob the ride of all its exhilaration, and despite Ben's arguments, he believed his acquaintances at Portsmouth would call him a thief.

After a short time, however, he lost a certain amount of gloominess in the excitement of the chase.

Ben's idea had been to keep about a mile in advance of the pursuers, allowing the horses to travel at a leisurely pace lest they should become exhausted if pressed to their best gait, and thus be unable to answer the demands of their riders in case a short burst of speed should be necessary to safety.

With this plan in view the boys listened intently as they advanced, and flattered themselves they were carrying out Ben's idea with great nicety, when suddenly the sound of hoof-beats in the rear ceased entirely.

“We’re in luck,” Ben shouted triumphantly, after halting to make certain nothing could be heard from the pursuers. “Your uncle has at last decided that a stern chase is likely to be a long one, and has acted wisely by turning back. Now, at least, we have nothing to fear.”

“I’m not so positive of that. He isn’t a man who would turn back without more of an effort to get the horse than has already been made, and perhaps this halt means new danger for me.”

“I don’t understand how that can be possible. Unless they follow there will be no chance of overtaking us.”

“Uncle Jacob knows the road better than we do. I think I saw a well-defined path leading to the right, not more than a mile back from here.”

“Well, what has that to do with us?”

“It may be a short cut, and we shall soon find them ahead.”

“I never thought of that possibility,” Ben replied in dismay, and then added, as the frown passed from his face: “It will do him precious little good to try to head us off. He won’t dare attempt anything against me, and I promise to ride them down if they stand in my way.”

“I don’t think he will make any effort to use force. It will be a simple matter to have me arrested, if he can warn the authorities at Manchester before we arrive.”

This was an idea which had never occurred to Ben, and that it alarmed him could readily be seen.

“That is exactly what Jacob Downs proposes to do! *Now* what’s to be done?”

“Look for a short cut ourselves, and ride around Manchester instead of passing through it. We don’t know the country; but if you are willing to stay by me I’ll take any chance, however desperate, rather than be forced to go back to Portsmouth.”

“Of course I’ll stay by you,” Ben replied promptly. “You shall take command from this moment, and I’ll obey orders strictly.”

All evidences of despondency disappeared from Ned’s face in the excitement of thwarting the relative whom he considered an enemy, and for the time being he forgot that he had made it possible for his acquaintances to call him a thief.

Riding slowly in advance, he scanned the apparently unbroken forest on either hand, until arriving at a point where a narrow path led from the road to the left, and into this he guided his horse.

“What have you struck here?” Ben asked as he followed his companion’s example.

“I don’t know. It takes us out of the direct course to Keene, and that is sufficient just now.”

“But we may find ourselves where it will be impossible to get back,” Ben cried in alarm.

“Perhaps, but yet I don’t think it likely. I said I was willing to take any chances rather than be sent back, and there is no need for you to follow if you prefer to keep on.”

“You know I wouldn’t leave you; but I can’t help wondering if this is a wise course to pursue.”

“It is the first path leading from Manchester that we have seen, and I don’t believe it safe to continue on any longer in the hope of finding a better way, for then it might be impossible to retrace our steps.”

“Ride on ; I won’t say another word against anything you may do.”

Ned urged his horse to a sharp trot, and during nearly an hour the fugitives continued on, oftentimes obliged to bend low in the saddle lest the overhanging trees should dismount them.

Then both the boys pulled their steeds up suddenly, for before them stood a small log hut, and it was evident the path they had been pursuing came to an end here.

There was no sign of life in the tiny clearing, and Ned rode entirely around the building twice, seeing no exit save a path leading to the right, evidently toward Manchester.

“It’s positive we can’t go much further in this direction unless we’re willing to make our way through the woods, and I’m not so certain that won’t be as wise a course as we can pursue. It isn’t many miles to the Nashua road, and we shan’t be traveling a great distance out of our way to go through that town. It is time the horses had dinner, and we may as well make a long halt here.”

Ben was out of the saddle before his friend ceased speaking, and the animals were unharnessed at once ; but this time the boys thought it prudent to hobble them in case a sudden departure became necessary.

Stretched at full length on the grass, the fugitives discussed their situation in all its bearings, as a means of deciding upon their course after leaving this place. They paid no heed to the possibility that the owner of the hut might return at any moment, for the appearance of the building on the outside gave evidence that it had long been unoccupied.

Therefore it was that they were almost surprised when a man, looking as if he might be a trapper, and armed with a rifle which had evidently seen no slight amount of service, came suddenly out from the thicket, where it was quite probable he had been spying upon his unbidden guests before making their acquaintance.

He nodded familiarly, looked critically at the horses, and then said as he threw himself on the ground by Ben's side, holding his weapon as if fancying there might be some sudden and immediate occasion for using it:

“Powerful warm to-day, eh? Have you traveled far, eh?”

“Not many miles,” Ned replied quickly. “Do you live here?”

“Yes, when I ain't somewhere else. The old place looks deserted, eh?”

“It does for a fact.”

“Didn't you try to get in, eh?”

“No; the doors appeared to be fastened, and we hadn't any business meddling with other people's property.

“You're mighty honest, eh? Well, I reckon it's

a heap more pleasant outside. Where are you bound, eh?"

The boys were not disposed to be over-communicative with this stranger; but he persisted in his questions, concluding each one with an "eh?" that irritated Ned, although he could not have explained why, until the fugitives told so much of their story as related to their intention of enlisting in the Continental army.

The proprietor of the cabin, while asking questions and listening to the replies, appeared as if expecting some one, and by the time the boys had confided in him as far as they thought advisable, a peculiar cry, similar to that of a bird in the distance, caused him to leap to his feet.

"I reckon you'd better stop with me to-night," he said hurriedly. "I've got a friend close at hand, who is countin' on stayin' here till mornin'; but there's plenty room for all hands, eh?"

Before either of the boys could reply he had disappeared among the underbrush, and Ben said in a tone of content:

"I guess we can't do better than accept the invitation. It'll be more comfortable than laying out in the woods, as would be necessary if we leave the traveled path, and the horses will be safer in the clearing."

"I can't say why I distrust that fellow; but there is something about him that doesn't seem just right."

"What is it?" Ben asked with a laugh.

“I don't know.”

“Then it can't be serious enough to prevent our taking advantage of his offer of a night's lodging. Besides, by staying here we can most likely learn how to reach the Nashua road by the shortest cut.”

Ned made no reply and a few moments later the sound of voices told that the owner of the hut and his friend were approaching.

The second comer was less pleasing to look upon than the first. He also was well armed, and evidently tried very hard to appear friendly; but during the few moments he talked with the boys, Ned observed that never once did he look directly at them. His eyes were fastened on the horses more frequently than on any other object, but it seemed almost as if he feared to gaze even at them many seconds at a time.

The proprietor of the building now began to act the part of host in a very energetic fashion. He opened the doors; built a fire, and soon a savory odor arose on the air, telling of preparations for a hearty meal.

The fact of his having fresh meat on hand was proof that he had not long been away from home when the boys arrived.

The second comer did not prolong his efforts at conversation; it was as if after the first odd attempt his powers in that line were exhausted, and he remained silent, as did also the boys, since they did not care to discuss their own affairs in the presence of a stranger.

The summons to dinner broke what was beginning to be an almost painful silence, and once inside the building the host did not allow the conversation to flag.

While helping the guests liberally to bear steaks cooked to a turn, and appetizing despite the season, he talked rapidly ; but never a word was spoken by his friend.

“Your hosses will be safe here,” he said to Ben when the meal had come to a close, “an’ you can make your bed anywhere on the floor, which is the best I’ve got, eh?”

“It seems as if we ought to travel further to-night,” Ben replied, noting the troubled look on Ned’s face.

“What’s the use, eh? You couldn’t get so very far, an’ by stayin’ here will be ready for an early start in the mornin’, eh?”

Ned was on the point of saying that they could not remain ; but refrained as he realized that it was impossible to give any good reason for going so soon, and, since he did not speak, Ben accepted the invitation.

Then the host excused himself on the plea of visiting some traps in the vicinity ; his friend accompanied him in obedience to a gesture, and the boys were left alone once more.

“You believe we had better push on?” Ben said with a smile.

“I suppose I am more foolish than ever because of having got mixed up this morning by uncle.

There is no reason why we shouldn't stop, and when the men come back we will get them to direct us by the nearest way to the Nashua road. Say, what kind of traps can that fellow be setting at this time of year?"

"Still suspicious? Of course he hasn't any traps set, but made that as an excuse to leave us. We needn't trouble about him, for it isn't likely he would do us any harm, so let's attend to the horses, and turn in for a nap. The more sleep we get now the less we shall need to-morrow night."

Ned did not think it would be possible to "bottle up sleep" just then, as his friend suggested; but he went "through the motion," and, an hour later, was greatly surprised to learn that he had been in dreamland so long.

Ben was on the floor by his side, breathing heavily, and he was about to close his eyes again in order to finish the nap, when he noted the fact that it was already growing dark.

"I reckon the horses need watering by this time," he muttered as he rose to his feet, "and if we don't attend to them pretty soon it will be too dark to see our way about. Hi! Ben! Turn out, and give me a hand!"

"What— Who— Have the men come back?" Ben asked in a sleepy tone as he assumed an upright position.

"No, I reckon not; I don't hear or see anything of them. We have slept quite a spell, and it's high time to make ready for the night."

“I wonder how long those fellows count on staying away?”

“It’s likely they’ll be here before dark,” and Ben stepped out of doors, adding as he did so, “I can’t see the horses! I thought they were hobbled so it would be impossible to stray very far.”

“So they were; I looked both of them over before we had supper, or whatever the meal may be called.”

Instead of replying, Ned walked to that part of the clearing where the animals had last been seen, and then directly across to the path which the boys supposed led to Manchester. Here he halted an instant, bent over, picked up something from the ground, and, holding it above his head, cried angrily:

“Here are the ropes we hobbled the horses with, and now it isn’t hard to understand why those fellows were so anxious we should stop with them a spell!”

“What do you men?” Ben asked in bewilderment as he went toward his friend.

“It is simple enough. While we were sleeping those fellows stole both horses, and are a dozen miles from here by this time.”

“Stole them? Are you certain?”

“Here are our halters, and if you look at these tracks it won’t take long to learn that the animals went out at a sharp trot, side by side, as wouldn’t have been the case had they strayed, or got frightened. Besides, the fact of their having been set loose shows it wasn’t an accident.”

Ben looked around as if completely mystified, and then asked helplessly:

“What is to be done?”

“Walk, I reckon, if we count on ever seeing Colonel Scammell, for there would be no use in chasing those fellows while they are mounted and we on foot.”

“But we can’t walk all the way from here to the Hudson River.”

“I had rather do it than go back to Portsmouth.”

“I won’t go home, after having started, without first enlisting; but we must have horses.”

“Where can we get them?”

“I don’t know.”

“Neither does any one else,” Ned replied with a laugh expressive of anger rather than mirth. “It surely is a case of walking if we go on, and, for that matter, so it is if we go back.”

The trail made by the stolen animals could be read without difficulty by boys who had been accustomed to studying such things all their lives, and when Ben walked up the path half a dozen yards he understood what had occurred quite as well as if he had seen the thieves when they took their departure.

By this time he was in such a frame of mind as prompted him to consider the future, and he asked:

“Have you any idea what we had better do? Of course we won’t go back, or try to follow those fellows, for most likely they have gone directly to Manchester.”

“In which case Uncle Jacob is likely to get his horse with but little trouble. I have started to enlist under Colonel Scammell, and intend to do it if I walk every foot of the way. I——”

The sound of footsteps caused him to look up suddenly, and to his great surprise he saw coming down the path a boy about his own age, clad in an old suit of homespun clothes which were hardly more than a collection of rags, and carrying a musket but little less dilapidated than his garments.

The newcomer was quite as astonished at this meeting as was either Ben or Ned, and for an instant acted very much as if about to retrace his steps.

“Halloo!” Ben cried in a friendly tone, and the stranger seemed to be fully assured by the voice.

“Do you live here?”

“Not much I don’t.”

“Do you know who does?”

“Sim Perkins claims to own the place; but I don’t reckon he’ll be ’round here a great deal after this.”

“Why not?”

Instead of replying the boy looked critically at the strangers, and then asked hesitatingly:

“Say, where’d you come from?”

“Portsmouth.”

“What you doin’ here?”

“We stopped to rest our horses.”

“Goin’ far?”

Ned hesitated as if unwilling to answer the question, and Ben, who liked the appearance of the

stranger despite his tattered clothes and wrecked gun, said promptly :

“ We are going to enlist.”

“ On which side ?”

“ Which side ?” Ben repeated in astonishment.

“ Do you suppose fellows from Portsmouth would go into the king’s army ?”

“ There’s a sight of ’em not far from there that have done it.”

“ Well, we’re not that kind. We shall enlist under Colonel Scammell, if we can find him.”

Again the stranger examined the two before him minutely, and was evidently well pleased with the result, for he said more cordially than before :

“ You’re the right stuff ; but you’ve come to a mighty queer place for a halt.”

“ What’s the matter here ?”

“ Nothin’ when Sim ain’t home ; but when he is, fellers like you had best keep away.”

“ Why ?”

“ Because he’s the worst tory ever breathed. Folks say he’s been off spyin’ round the country for the Britishers, an’ only come back this time when things got so hot for him he didn’t dare stay near Boston outside the redcoats’ camp. He’s gone now, for good I reckon, seein’s how he an’ Bart Hodgkins had a couple of hosses. Where he got ’em beats me, for there isn’t a decent man in these parts would sell him one, no matter how much he money might offer.”

“ The horses he has got now didn’t cost him very much,” Ned said grimly. “ He stole them from us.”

CHAPTER III.

JOSH HIGGINS.

THE conversation between the would-be soldiers and their new acquaintance was prolonged until after the sun had set, and then all three went into the log house for the night.

Josh Higgins, as the stranger called himself, represented that he "jest lived 'round," with no relatives so far as he knew, and an ardent desire to become a soldier. He had been "workin' his board" with a farmer who lived a few miles from the clearing, but despite all his efforts could not earn sufficient to purchase the equipments necessary to a recruit.

"I reckon I could fight jest as well in this rig as if I had all the gold-lace General Clinton owns tied 'round me," he said grimly; "but them as knows, say I've got to take a better gun, a better suit of clothes, better shoes, an' I reckon, cordin' to all acounts, I'll have to fix up a better face before I can 'list."

"I know it is necessary to own equipments," Ned said musingly; "but I can't believe a fellow would be rejected in case he was too poor to buy them.

If you have no home, why not join us? We shall be forced to walk from here to headquarters; but I guess we can pull through all right, and at this season of the year it isn't a great hardship to sleep out of doors."

"If you'll take me I'll be glad of the chance; it's jest what I've been wantin' for a good while."

"Of course we'll take you," Ben said quickly and decidedly. "It will be mighty handy to have you with us while we're in this part of the country."

"I'm pretty well posted up Bennington way, where I reckon Sim Perkins and Bart Hodgkins will stop a spell. Say, it wouldn't be a bad job to get them hosses back? I'd like to make a try for it!"

"Why do you think the thieves will go to Bennington?"

"'Cause a couple of tories live there, an' are great chums with Sim. He's most allers dodgin' 'round their place."

"If we should overtake the fellows I promise to get my property," Ben said with a threatening gesture.

"Sim ain't no ways easy to handle when his blood is up," Josh replied warmly. "Even if he *is* sich a scoundrel, he can shoot with the best, an' it isn't often he misses, so you don't want to be too brash. Let's see what he's got to eat in his shanty, an' cook some kind of a supper."

The boys acted upon their new friend's suggestion, and soon had the best of evidence that he was

a good cook, for he set a most appetizing meal before them, helping himself with a liberal hand to the tory's provisions, of which there was ample store in the cabin.

Josh was in high spirits after Ned claimed that he would be allowed to enlist even though not fully equipped, and during the remainder of the evening entertained his friends with stories of Sim Perkins' villainy, or Bart Hodgkins' meanness.

"If we go for soldiers we shall see that precious pair again, or I'm mistaken," he declared emphatically, and then, laying down on the bare floor, fell asleep so quickly it seemed as if the last words must have been spoken while he was in dreamland.

Ben and Ned might have slumbered until a very late hour next morning but for Josh. That young gentleman aroused them before it was yet light, and even then had a hearty breakfast cooked.

"I allowed we'd better get all we could out of Sim Perkins before leavin'," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "so I overhauled the stuff, an' have fixed up a pretty fair spread. He'll be surprised at the way his grub has disappeared, if he comes here again."

"You must have been awake half the night to cook all this," Ned said in surprise.

"I reckon I ain't lost much sleep. A fellow like me, what's been knocked 'round from pillar to post, gets into the habit of movin' pretty lively in the mornin'. We oughter be a good ten miles on our way before the sun is very high; but it won't be done unless you fellers pitch into the grub."

“If you hold out as you’ve begun, we shall get over the ground mighty fast,” Ben said approvingly, and after a hurried toilet in the cool water of a spring near-by the three boys did full justice to the meal.

Josh claimed to be able to lead them through the woods to any desired spot, and the gray light of the coming dawn had but just appeared in the eastern sky when they set out on what was to prove a wearisome journey.

The new member of the party seemed only happy when exerting himself, and Ben and Ned traveled twice the distance on this day that they would have done alone, because of his continual urging to “walk a little further before halting.”

At nightfall a shelter of boughs were put up, and the would-be soldiers, weary from the fatiguing tramp, slept as only tired boys can.

During three days Josh led them on the way, and at the third camp made a startling and unexpected movement.

“We’re about six miles from Bennington, an’ before noon to-morrow I’ll show you the place where I wouldn’t be surprised to find Sim Perkins an’ Bart.”

“Are we so near as that?” Ben cried in surprise. “It doesn’t seem possible we can be more than half-way.”

“That’s ’cause you’ve kept movin’,” Josh replied. “The great thing is to keep movin’ no matter what you’ve got to do, an’ the job is done mighty quick.”

The travelers were too tired to spend very much time in conversation after supper had been eaten, and soon they were enjoying the perfect rest of the weary, happy in the belief that there was a possibility of depriving the thieves of their plunder.

When the sun rose again, awakening Ben and Ned by flashing its rays in their faces, Josh was nowhere to be seen.

From the first moment he joined the party Master Higgins had been foremost wherever work was to be found, never waiting to be reminded of his duty, but always taking the lead. Therefore it was that both the boys were decidedly astonished when their cheery companion was conspicuous only by his absence.

“What can have happened?” Ben asked in perplexity. “It is certain Josh wouldn’t attempt to take any advantage of us, and yet why isn’t he here? I have gotten so accustomed to seeing breakfast ready when I open my eyes, that it seems odd to find matters in this condition.”

“Perhaps he has grown tired of doing all the work,” Ned suggested, after assuring himself that Josh was not in the vicinity. “I can’t say I should blame him very much if he had, for, as a matter of fact, Ben, we have allowed him to wait upon us like a servant.”

“He *would* do it, despite all we could say, therefore I don’t think we can be blamed. Something serious must have happened, or he would be here now.”

“I don’t believe he is in any trouble, for he went away of his own will, it is evident, otherwise we would have been awakened by his cries for help.”

“Unless some enemy jumped in on him so suddenly that there wasn’t even time to make a noise.”

“What enemies could he have in this section of the country?”

“That’s a question I can’t answer; but there surely is some reason for his leaving so suddenly.”

“I don’t deny that, and we shall soon know what it is, I reckon. Let’s get breakfast, for he’ll be hungry when he comes back.”

Ben was inclined to take a despondent view of the case. He did not believe Josh had thus absented himself voluntarily, and was almost angry because Ned treated the matter so lightly.

The larder was not so well filled as when they were in Sim Perkins’ clearing, yet there was sufficient wholesome food, and this was warmed in front of a small blaze, for the boys had halted in a thicket so dense that it would have been dangerous to make a campfire of ordinary size.

An hour passed, and Josh remained absent.

Ned understood by the look on his friend’s face that Ben was growing thoroughly alarmed regarding the missing member of the party, and as a means of diverting his thoughts said with a mirthless laugh:

“I’d like to know whether Uncle Jacob saw Sim Perkins with our horses.”

“He must have done so if the thieves went through Manchester.”

“If they met, I’ll guarantee Sim and his precious friend lost their plunder. Uncle Jacob would follow him a good deal further than we intend to go, rather than lose the animal. At any event I shall always be called a thief by those who know of what I did.”

“I thought you had given over that nonsense some time ago,” Ben said petulantly. “No one in Portsmouth would call you such a name.”

“But as a matter of fact I did really steal the horse.”

“I don’t think so; he was yours to all intents and purposes, and but for the fact that you proposed to enlist in the Continental army, Jacob Downs would never have made a fuss.”

“I reckon he wouldn’t have given me permission to go very far from home, because in my absence it would be necessary to hire a man about the place.”

“And by saving the wages of one, you fairly earned the horse, which was considered yours by everybody.”

“That is looking at the matter from my standpoint, but Uncle Jacob would give a very different complexion to the story if he told it,” and now it was Ned’s turn to grow despondent, as he always did whenever the subject was discussed.

Fortunately for both the boys the tide of their thoughts was soon turned. Before Ben could reply to his friend’s remark a rustling was heard amid the foliage, and a few seconds later Josh Higgins, looking as happy and contented as ever, stood before them.

“Where have you been?” Ben cried. “I feared some one had carried you away.”

“If there was a chance of anything like that, I guess I could make enough noise to waken you fellers before bein’ lugged very far.”

“But where have you been?”

“Over to the town. It was a good night for scouting around, and I thought I’d take advantage of it.”

“Have you walked six miles from sunrise?” Ned asked in surprise.

“To go and come makes a good twelve,” Josh replied with a cheery smile as he made a vigorous attack upon the eatables before him; “but I haven’t done it since sunrise. I started about midnight.”

“Why didn’t you tell us you were going?”

“Because I wasn’t certain the tories were at the house, and in case of their having gone on there was no reason why all three should take the tramp.”

“Did you really find them?” Ben cried excitedly.

“That’s what I did. Leastways, I saw your hosses, and reckon the thieves were in the house, though it didn’t seem jest wise to make certain about it.”

It required no slight amount of time for Josh to tell his story, interrupted as he frequently was by his companions, and while industriously engaged in devouring the food. It was finished at last, however, at the same time the breakfast came to an end, and was in brief as follows:

He had arrived at the house where he believed the tories would make a long halt, within two hours after leaving the camp, and his first care was to visit the stable. There he saw, in addition to several other animals, the horses ridden by Sim Perkins and Hodgkins on the afternoon they so hurriedly left the clearing.

From the appearance of the steeds he judged that they had not been there more than a few hours, therefore it was reasonable to suppose the visitors would remain until the following evening, however brief a stay they had determined upon.

“I tried to get inside the house, but couldn’t,” he said in conclusion. “It don’t make any great matter, for we’ve got nothin’ to do with that part of the premises. My plan is to go over after dark, an’ lay ’round till there’s a clear chance for runnin’ away with the hosses. I’m allowin’ to get one for myself at the same time.”

“Another case of horse-stealing,” Ned said in a low tone, as if speaking to himself.

“I don’t call it so,” Josh retorted promptly. “They are tories, and we, soldiers of the Continental army——”

“Since when?”

“We *shall* be as soon as we find a chance to enlist, so it amounts to the same thing. To take an extra hoss from the stable would be what’s called cripplin’ the enemy, an’ you’ll see me cripple him to-night, unless I’m makin’ a big mistake.”

“I am not the one who should say anything

about what you propose doing, since I had no better excuse than you."

"So far, I claim there has been no crime committed," Ben cried warmly, "and if Josh sees a chance to get hold of another animal, I believe it is right to do it, since in such a way he is serving the Continental forces."

"How do you make that out?"

"He will simply be adding three able-bodied soldiers to the army considerably sooner than it could otherwise be done. Wait until we are home again before you accuse yourself any more, and then by what we have accomplished can be determined the degree of your guilt. Just now I want to hear Josh's plans for the evening."

"It won't take long to explain 'em. We'll sneak along that way this afternoon, and when the tories are tucked up in bed, get the hosses, that's all."

"Yes, that's all just now," Ned said with a hearty laugh; "but there may be a disagreeable story to tell later."

"You think I can't get 'em?"

"I didn't say that; but I fancy it won't be quite such a simple matter as you make out."

"I could have brought 'em with me, an' not half tried, this mornin'!"

"Why didn't you do it?"

"Because they looked as if they'd been used hard, an' I'd rather wait till they was fresh."

Josh treated the whole affair, fraught with danger as it must necessarily be, in such a matter-

of-fact manner that his companions laughed loud and long, greatly to his mystification.

Finally Ned explained the reason for his mirth, and he replied quietly :

“I’d be ashamed of myself if I couldn’t get the best of Sim Perkins. He thinks he’s terrible smart ; but if I once have the chance to be a soldier, I’ll show him how much he knows.”

“You won’t probably have an opportunity, Josh. Soldiers are not allowed to skirmish around as they please, but are kept together under the strictest discipline.”

“Then I won’t enlist, but go it on my own hook for a spell. I’m just achin’ to give Sim a lesson !”

“I reckon getting the horses from him will be enough.”

“Not half what he deserves,” Josh replied as he stretched himself out at full length under the shelter of the lean-to, and an instant later his loud breathing told that he was adding to the credit side of his “sleep account.”

Ben and Ned passed the time as best they could until noon, and then the young gentleman who had really taken command of the party awakened.

“I reckon we might as well be movin’,” he said as he rose to his feet. “Do you fellers want anything more to eat ?”

“That’s about all we’ve been doing this forenoon ; but you’d better have a couple of bites,” Ned replied.

“I can do that as we’re joggin’ along.”

As usual Josh took the greater portion of the burden on his own shoulders, despite the protests of his companions, and trudged silently on in advance, turning neither to the right nor left, so familiar with the course had he become by the night's excursion.

Neither of the others ventured to speak while he remained silent, for they did not know but that there was a necessity for caution, and well it was they followed the example set by Josh, for after traveling nearly two hours he suddenly held up his hand in warning, as the sound of human voices came from a thicket a short distance in advance.

The boy had led them within fifty yards of the stable they intended to visit, and halted where he could overlook the clearing immediately in front of it.

Ben and Ned were instantly plunged into a state of highest excitement, as, peering through the foliage, they saw, not more than twenty feet away, Sim Perkins and Bart Hodgkins.

The men were seated on a log smoking contentedly, and glancing from time to time at the house a short distance beyond, where were a number of horsemen apparently just starting on a journey.

"They're tories, the whole nest of 'em, an' some-time I'll be the one to help bag jest sich a crowd," Josh whispered as he stole silently back to his friends.

Ned motioned for him to cease speaking, for the two in whom he was particularly interested were conversing earnestly, and there was a possibility of overhearing the words.

“You’re gettin’ weak-kneed, Bart, that’s what’s the matter, eh?” Sim was saying. “It ain’t half so skeery as stayin’ ’round here jest now, eh? It won’t be much of a job to find the Frenchman, an’ once we can get on the right side of him, the rest will be easy as rollin’ off a log, eh?”

“But will it pay?”

“Pay? There’s a fortune in it. Don’t you reckon Lord Conwallis would jest about give all his old boots if he could bag Lafayette, eh? Once that Frenchman’s out of the way it wouldn’t be half a job to wipe out all the Continentals in the south, eh? I tell you it’s worth more’n hangin’ ’round where there’s chance of gettin’ our necks stretched, an’ not a bit of danger, eh?”

“It’s a long journey.”

“We’d take a longer one if some of these rebels ’round here knowed all we’d done, eh?”

“Look here, Sim!” Hodgkins cried angrily as he rose to his feet, “I won’t have you forever harpin’ on what we’ve done. There’s no use speakin’ ’bout it when somebody might hear.”

“I reckon we’re far enough from the house so’s to talk without fear, eh? Now don’t run like a partridge, scared at your own shadder, till you’ve made up your mind whether you’ll come with me on this trip or not, eh?”

“Of course I’ll go with you; but there must be less of your funny talk, for I don’t like it,” and before Sim could reply his friend was walking rapidly toward the building.

CHAPTER IV.

A RAID.

NOT until after several moments had elapsed was the full significance of the words understood by the listeners, and then they glanced at each other as if animated by the same thought.

There was no opportunity to discuss the matter, for Sim Perkins still remained on the log smoking as contentedly as if thoughts of treachery had never entered his mind, and the boys were so near that he might have heard a whisper, unless, as when Josh had spoken, it was unusually soft and guarded.

They had learned that which would be of more value than the horses the men had stolen, provided it could be told at headquarters within a reasonable length of time, and all three were literally trembling with excitement as they realized how greatly they might aid the struggling patriots by divulging Sim's secret.

Josh was particularly delighted at having overheard the conversation, for, as he argued to himself, he could hardly be refused the privilege of enlisting, whether equipped or not, when it was learned that through his assistance the spies' plot had been discovered.

During fully an hour the boys were forced to stand silent and motionless in the thicket, for Sim remained that length of time apparently revolving the plan in his mind, and before they were at liberty to assume more comfortable positions the guests at the house had departed.

When the last horseman rode out of the clearing Sim went leisurely toward the building, and those in the thicket retreated a few yards where the foliage was so dense that they could remain hidden, even though a searcher should pass within half a dozen feet.

Josh was the first to break the long silence, and he said in a tone of mingled triumph and glee:

“I reckon it has paid us to hunt up them hosses, whether we ever get hold of ’em or not.”

“Indeed it has!” Ned replied emphatically, “and now I am beginning to question whether it will be well to make a raid on the stable.”

“What has caused such a change in your ideas?” Ben asked curiously.

“The fact that we have important information to carry to headquarters. There is a certain amount of danger in trying to recover the animals, however simple Josh believes the work to be, and we had better lose a dozen horses than run the risk of being unable to reveal Sim’s plans to the proper officers.”

“You fear some of us may get hurt?”

“It might happen that we were discovered, and, being made prisoners, not allowed to leave until

after Sim and his precious friend had done all the mischief possible."

"We must have hosses if we count on gettin' ahead of 'em," Josh said decidedly. "In case they leave here mounted, an' we follow on foot, there's mighty little show of our blockin' their game."

"Josh is right," Ben added. "We must get the animals, if for no other reason than to prevent those men from traveling rapidly."

"I fancy they could find other horses in case we succeeded in taking our own."

"That is true; but we would be riding as fast as they, and there wouldn't be time enough to carry out the scheme, provided we had no difficulty in finding an officer of our army. *Now* I am certain Josh will be warranted in taking possession of any horse we come across."

"There's no question about it," Ned replied thoughtfully, "and if we can upset Sim's scheme I shall think I may be forgiven for taking Uncle Jacob's nag."

Josh was confident he could pilot the party to the Hudson River, and once that point was reached there would be but little difficulty in finding the headquarters of the army, providing they were not intercepted by the enemy.

During an hour or more the boys discussed the matter, and then, the subject having been exhausted, all remained silent, waiting for the moment when it would be possible to take the first step in the action which might have such important results for the cause all had at heart.

Night came slowly.

When the darkness had shrouded the earth, sounds of revelry could be heard from the tory's home, and Josh said, in a tone of satisfaction :

"They're goin' to make a night of it, I reckon. We shall have to wait a little longer than I counted on ; but the job will be all the easier when the right time comes."

"When do you propose to begin operations?" Ned asked.

"Not before midnight, and even later, if they haven't quieted down by then. We shall get a good six-hours' start, an' it'll be our own fault if we don't ride so far ahead that the only thing them fellers can do is to whistle."

Half an hour after, the boys moved cautiously to the edge of the clearing, where they could have the buildings in full view, and then came the most dreary of all the long time of inaction.

Once Josh ventured to remark that it was fortunate for them the tories did not keep dogs, but no one felt like sustaining any lengthy conversation.

All were fully aware of the danger attending their proposed raid, and were mentally bracing themselves for the struggle which might ensue.

It was not yet midnight when the sounds of revelry died away ; one by one the lights in the building were extinguished, and Ben rose to his feet, believing the decisive moment had arrived.

"Wait an hour longer," Josh whispered. "Give 'em time to get sound asleep ; we can better afford to do that than run the risk of a reg'lar battle."

“I thought you believed the work could be done very easily?”

“So I do, providin’ we don’t rush. There’s times when it pays to keep movin’; but this ain’t one of ’em.”

“It seems to me we ought to have our plans well mapped out before we start, and yet so far we haven’t said a word regarding what is to be done.”

“Well,” Josh replied slowly, recognizing by this remark that his new friends had really elected him leader of the enterprise, “here’s about the whole of it. The door of the stable is fastened with a big padlock, an’ you fellers must contrive in some way to get it off while I’m inside harnessin’ the hosses. There’s a window with a shutter to it on the other end of the building, an’ that’s where I’ll go in. If anybody shows up before we’ve got the nags out of doors, we must lay low, an’ wait for another chance; but if everything is ready, then I shall ride away, no matter how many tories are around.”

“Is it understood that we are to use our muskets?” Ned asked.

“I shall get off once I’ve brought a hoss out of the stable,” Josh replied in a meaning tone.

“How are we to tackle the padlock?” Ben asked of Ned.

“Unless the staples are clenched very firmly, we should be able to draw them with our musket-barrels. If that can’t be done, I see no other way than to cut them out.”

“That will take a long while.”

“It’s the only way, and we’ve got at least six hours before us. Of course we’re not to spend any more time than is actually necessary; but sixty minutes won’t be wasted if we then succeed in getting off without having given an alarm.”

Then came another time of suspense, which was ended by Josh, who said :

“I reckon we can start now. Don’t bother ’bout me, ’cause I’ll get inside without any trouble; but work the best you know how at the door. I’ll go ahead, an’ you follow.”

Young Higgins did not propose to take unnecessary chances.

Although it was reasonable to suppose the inmates of the house were all wrapped in slumber, he approached the stable as cautiously as if every one was on the alert.

Bending low, he skirted the edge of the clearing until the stable was between himself and the dwelling, and then went boldly to work.

Ben and Ned saw him push gently aside the small shutter of the window through which the refuse of the barn was thrown out, and then they began their task.

Fortunately for the success of their plans, the timbers of the door were so heavy that the staples simply penetrated the wood, instead of passing through sufficiently far to be clenched, and it was but the work of a few seconds to draw out one by aid of the muskets.

Josh had succeeded only in saddling Ned’s horse

when his companions entered, and Ben whispered:

“I’ll attend to mine, while you get one for yourself.”

“There ain’t much chance for a choice,” Josh replied grimly. “Last night four others were here, but now nothin’ is left except a mule.”

“That would be worse than nothing.”

“I’m not so certain, an’ shan’t be till I try,” Josh said as he began saddling the long-eared animal. “Ridin’ a mule is a good ways ahead of walkin’.”

Five minutes from the time the boys entered the stable they were on the outside with the animals, ready for the start.

Josh led his steed around to the rear of the building, the others following, and from there into the thicket, stopping when he was screened from view to say triumphantly:

“It wasn’t so much of a job as I counted on. Now I allow we will have to push through the woods a couple of miles before havin’ a chance to ride.”

“Don’t wait here to talk, but go on,” Ben said impatiently. “That beast of yours may take it into his head to bray, and if he should, the tories will be awakened no matter how soundly they may sleep.”

Josh pushed on once more, making no reply, and when he next halted it was at a well-defined road leading southwest.

“I reckon this is what we wanted to find,” he

said as he mounted. "Now it's a question of ridin' at full speed till daylight, when we'd better get under cover."

The boys clambered into the saddle while he was speaking, and by the time he concluded all were ready for the flight.

Before two miles had been traversed Ben and Ned realized that Josh's mule could travel much faster than the horses. Their steeds were being urged forward at the highest speed possible, while the long-eared animal not only kept pace with them, but was, apparently, making no undue exertion.

"You set the pace, and I'll keep close in the rear," Josh cried as he allowed his companions to ride past.

"You could run us out of sight in half an hour."

"That's what I'm afraid of doing unless I stay behind. Say, this beats walkin', eh? I don't know but that I'd be willin' to foot it a day or two though, if by so doin' I could see Sim Perkins when he discovers what has been done."

"You may see him too soon for comfort," Ben cried joyously. He was in the best of spirits now he was in the saddle once more, and the future had no terrors for him.

"That can't be after I've once enlisted. All I ask for is to be a reg'lar soldier when we do meet, an' then there won't be anything wrong in shootin' him same's I would a polecat."

However much the boys desired to talk over their

late exploit, it could not be done owing to the difficulty of sustaining a conversation while riding at such speed, and after this last remark of Josh's nothing was said until at least two hours had elapsed.

There were no obstacles in the path, and on they went at rapid pace, intent only on traversing the greatest possible distance before the sun should rise.

The hoof-beats of the horses rang out loud and distinct on the night air, but since there was no longer any fear the inmates of the house in the clearing could be disturbed by the noise, it sounded like sweetest music in the ears of the successful raiders.

Not until day had fairly dawned did Josh allow his companions to draw rein, and then the steeds stood sadly in need of a halt.

They had ridden four hours, and it was safe to assume had traveled at least thirty miles.

The little party had arrived at a stream which it was necessary to cross, and on the opposite bank, some distance from the road, were the ruins of a log house, probably once the scene of an attack by the Indians.

"I reckon we had better pull up there," Josh said as he guided his mule into the water. "We don't know this section of the country, and, according to my way of thinkin', it won't be safe to travel in the daytime."

"It isn't possible the king's troops can be near

here," Ben said, believing his companion, hitherto so brave, was suddenly growing timorous.

"That's what we can't say, and there's no reason for runnin' any risk. The hosses won't be able to travel more than ten or twelve hours in every twenty-four, and we shall get ahead just as fast if we move only at night."

"But I don't think we are yet far enough in advance of the tories."

"They can't come in pursuit until after pickin' up more hosses, an' considerin' that most likely they don't yet know of what has been done, I reckon we're all right for a spell."

Then, as if believing it was useless to discuss the matter, Josh led the way to the ruins, where was found ample opportunity for remaining concealed from any who might pass on the road.

The animals were taken a long distance into the woods, where plenty of grass was to be had, and there hobbled securely.

Then Josh insisted on returning to the ruins, instead of remaining in the thicket as his companions proposed.

"If anybody comes after us, we must know it," he said decidedly. "We'll take turns at standin' watch, and as soon as the sun sets move ahead once more."

The precautions against a surprise, as taken by Josh, appeared to be an excess of prudence when night came and not a traveler had been seen on the road; but he did not consider the labor performed in vain.

“It’s better to keep one eye open all the time, than be nabbed while you’ve got both shut,” he said with an air of exceeding wisdom when, at night-fall, the flight was resumed.

During this portion of the journey the fugitives were repaid for their previous mishaps. Until arriving at the Hudson River they met no one who made any attempt to molest them, and twice during the journey halts were made at the houses of farmers, where grain for the animals and warm food for themselves could be procured.

Ben was the only member of the party who had any money, and the amount in his possession was so small that it would hardly have sufficed to pay for one meal at a hotel.

When they stood on the bank of the river there was no thought of exchanging the horses for a boat, as had been Ben’s first intention.

They could ride as rapidly as it would be possible to sail down the stream, and it seemed much like the act of a spendthrift to abandon steeds which could readily be sold for good prices in case they were not allowed to retain them after enlisting.

“We’ll hold on to what we’ve got as long as we can,” Josh said decidedly, as they halted and fed the animals with a generous quantity of corn which had been purchased that day. “We can’t be very far from the army now, an’ there’s nothin’ to prevent our pushin’ ahead as long as the hosses can stand it. ‘Cordin’ to my way of thinkin’ we shan’t get there with our news any too quick.”

It was known at Portsmouth that Colonel Scammell's command was encamped at Dobb's Ferry, when the latest information from headquarters was brought to that town, and there the boys believed their long journey would come to an end, for even though the colonel had gone elsewhere, it was only reasonable to suppose some portion of the army would be at that place.

Until they were within half a dozen miles of their destination nothing worth recounting occurred, and then, all unsuspecting there were armed men in the vicinity, while riding through a narrow strip of wooded country a loud command to halt caused the three to look around in apprehension.

No person was to be seen, and Josh, who had partially reined in his mule, said with a laugh:

"Come on, boys, I don't reckon we're so soft as to be frightened when some very funny feller tries to scare us."

"Halt, or I'll fire!" came in a commanding voice from the thicket, and as no one appeared to give emphasis to the demand, Josh cried jeeringly:

"Show yourself, an' then we'll see whether its worth our while or not."

While one might have counted twenty the boys waited nervously for the appearance of the speaker, and then, to the surprise of all, a squad of uniformed men marched out of the woods, led by an officer who bore no insignia of rank.

"Where did you come from?" the commander asked as he approached the boys.

“Portsmouth, in the province of New Hampshire,” Ned replied after waiting an instant for one of his companions to speak. “We have come to enlist, and would like to be directed to Colonel Scammell’s camp, if it is anywhere in the vicinity.”

“Dismount.”

“Are we near the camp?”

“Dismount!” and the officer drew his sword.

Silently and wonderingly the boys obeyed, and instantly three of the men mounted the steeds, riding quickly away as if in obedience to orders already received.

“What is the meaning of this?” Ned cried angrily, determined that he would not be deprived of his horse, even by an armed force, without a protest.

“My duty is to collect all horses found in the possession of civilians, for the use of the army. Here is an order by which you will receive a warrant for money in payment of that which has been taken,” and after writing a few lines the officer handed Ned a slip of paper, certifying that from him and his two companions had been taken three animals, of a value yet to be determined.

“Where shall I present this?”

“At headquarters, five or six miles further down the river. If you want to enlist, my taking the horses will cause you no other inconvenience than that of walking there.”

“But see here, mister,” Josh said in a persuasive tone. “We have got news for Colonel Scammell that must be delivered at once.”

“There is nothing now to prevent your seeing the colonel, providing he is in camp.”

“It will take us two hours to walk that far, an’ we’re none too fresh for such a journey after having been in the saddle nine days.”

“It will do you good to stretch your legs a bit,” the officer replied as he turned toward his men. “I am simply obeying orders, and there is no use in attempting to discuss the matter with me.”

“But tell us how to get to headquarters, or wherever Colonel Scammell may be, won’t you?”

“Follow the river,” was the impatient reply, and then the soldiers were marching silently back to their place of concealment, there to await the coming of more horses which might be seized.

“Well,” Josh said with a long-drawn sigh as the men disappeared from view. “It seems as if these fellers don’t believe in tryin’ to butter parsnips with fine words. They couldn’t have given Sim Perkins himself a colder shoulder. Now it’s a case of walkin’, I reckon.”

Neither Ned nor Ben made any reply. They had fancied a different reception when they presented themselves as recruits, and especially while bringing valuable information, therefore both were sadly disappointed.

“This is where it pays to keep on movin’,” Josh said cheerily as he led the way down the road. “We ain’t half as bad off as we might be, an’ it’ll come out all right when we find the colonel.”

CHAPTER V.

A SECRET MISSION.

BEN did not accept the seizure of the horses with a very good grace, and was almost inclined to quarrel with Josh because he continued so cheerful under such disagreeable circumstances.

“We were not treated any worse when we fell in with the tory spies,” he grumbled as the three trudged wearily on. “They did no more than steal our horses, and, with that exception, treated us in a civil manner. It seems pretty rough to be robbed by those who should be our friends, especially after we have worked so hard to bring three soldiers to the army.”

“But we are to be paid for the animals—that is, you and Ned will collect the value of the beasts you rode, but I shall be forced to make a present of mine.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“It was all right to take the mule in order to assist in recruiting for the Continental forces; but if I should sell her, then what we did the other night would be nothing less than stealing. I don’t feel as if I had any reason to grumble simply because I am forced to walk half a dozen miles—it was

mighty fortunate I didn't have to foot it all the way from home."

"If you can't receive payment, neither can I," Ned added emphatically, "and I'm not so sure but that I am glad matters have turned exactly in this way. It seems as if it cleared me, in a certain degree, of the charge of stealing Uncle Jacob's horse. I suppose that is whittling the thing down very small; but yet there's considerable satisfaction in it for me."

"If you fellows look at the matter so calmly, I suppose I had better hold my tongue," Ben said impatiently; "but at the same time it's an outrage, even though two of the animals did not really belong to us."

"Of course you will explain why Josh and I refuse payment?"

"There is no necessity of saying anything about it. I will collect the money they see fit to pay me for my horse, and let it go at that."

"But I would rather it was known," Ned persisted.

"Very well," Ben replied moodily. "Suppose you take charge of the whole affair. It won't be a question of bargaining as to the amount; but of simply receiving what they choose to give."

"Well, I'll look out for your interests, and now for the first time since Uncle Jacob overtook us I feel really comfortable in mind. It is only right he should contribute something to the cause, and he's being let off cheaply."

Ned did not attempt to explain how his fault was atoned for by the seizure of the beast, and most likely for the very good reason that he could not have done so. It was sufficient for him that the mental burden had been removed, and he did not care to analyze the matter.

As for Josh, he was well satisfied with whatever happened. He had had no compunctions about taking the mule from the Tories, and the fact that a six-mile tramp was now necessary, gave him little concern; it was simply another incident in his transformation from civilian to soldier.

Ben was the only member of the party who considered himself aggrieved, and, owing to this fact, he strode on in advance at a rapid pace, too deeply concerned with his own injuries to realize the fatigue of this last stage of the journey.

It was nearly nightfall, and the boys had been traveling in almost perfect silence an hour, when on coming around a turn in the road they found their progress barred by a small body of troops, drawn up as if to receive an enemy.

"Now what do you suppose *these* fellows want?" Ben exclaimed in a low tone. "The others got our horses, so there's nothing left to be stolen but our muskets."

"I don't reckon they're here for our benefit. Perhaps we have reached the camp."

"It isn't possible we've walked six miles yet."

"You pushed on so fast that we may have done so, and——"

Ned was interrupted by an officer, who rode quickly forward, and stopped his horse directly in front of them.

“Where did you come from, and where are you going?”

“We *did* count on enlisting,” Ben replied hotly; “but you people don’t seem disposed to give a fellow a chance. What with stealing our horses——”

Ned, afraid his friend might give offense where it would work to their disadvantage, interrupted by saying:

“We are from Portsmouth, in the Province of New Hampshire, and wish to find Colonel Scammell’s headquarters. Our horses were seized by some soldiers who claimed to be Continentals, and told us we would find the colonel in this direction.”

The officer scrutinized them closely, and then calling two of his men to his side, said to the would-be recruits:

“You will be conducted to headquarters, and if your story is true there will be no difficulty about enlisting.”

“If it is true?” Ben cried. “We’ve got the paper that was given us regarding the number of horses taken——”

“There will be ample opportunity to show that later. Follow these men, and keep your complaints for those who have time to listen to them.”

Then the officer rejoined his troop, and the boys were gruffly told to “move on,” a command which did not tend to soothe Ben’s ruffled temper, although he obeyed promptly.

“It seems to me you don’t care for recruits, since you treat strangers in this way,” he said to the soldier who marched beside him.

“It is because you *are* strangers that so much precaution is taken. I don’t know what may be going to happen, but it’s certain an important movement is about to be executed, for the orders are very strict regarding travelers, as if there was something at headquarters which should not be seen. You’ll find, however, that three stout fellows like you and your friends will be welcomed heartily, once it is known you are all right.”

The soldier was so friendly that Ben’s ill-temper disappeared rapidly, and before they had walked half a mile the boys were conversing with their guards as if with old friends.

The men explained that within the past twenty-four hours the most rigid orders had been given concerning visitors to the camp, and that all who passed on the main road were subjected to the strictest scrutiny, for which purpose troops were sent out in every direction to intercept travelers before they could arrive within view of headquarters.

Why this was done the guards could not say; but they believed some important movement was contemplated, the chief point of which was secrecy.

“Our orders are to take you to the guardhouse, unless you can be vouched for by some of the officers,” the man said at length. “Of course it will soon be seen that you are what you represent

yourselves to be, and then that which now seems rough usage will be forgotten, for we need recruits at this time if we ever did."

"My father is a lieutenant in Colonel Scammell's light infantry," Ben said quickly.

"In that case you won't have much trouble. I will try to find him. What is his name?"

"Jaffreys—Lieutenant Joseph Jaffreys."

Half an hour later the boys were marched into a village of tents, where were what seemed an immense number of men lounging around as if their only purpose in life was to pass the time in the most comfortable manner possible. There was very little of the "pomp and circumstance" of war apparent, and the new recruits were sadly disappointed in the scene, although neither could have explained what he expected to see.

The newcomers were ushered into a log hut which served as guard-tent, and remained there ten long minutes before Ben's father entered, when their imprisonment was at an end.

Lieutenant Jaffreys was not greatly surprised at seeing his son, who he knew would enter the army as soon as he was of suitable age, but he appeared astonished that the boys should have traveled so far to join his command.

"You couldn't have come at a better time," the lieutenant said after greeting Ned, and being introduced to Josh. "We are sadly in need of men, particularly now, when something important is about to be done."

“What is it, father?”

“That is more than I can say; but we shall all know very soon, I fancy. Come to my tent, and we will decide about the enlistment in the morning.”

Ben was so happy at meeting his father that for the moment he forgot the information which he brought, and Ned reminded him of it by saying:

“You had better tell what we heard at Bennington.”

The story was soon related, and although the boys had believed it important, they were surprised by the effect which it had upon Lieutenant Jaffreys.

“Stand here till I come back,” he said after questioning all three closely. “I may be gone some time, and if it is late before I return, ask the way to my tent.”

“Can’t you show us where it is?” Ben asked.

“I haven’t the time. Any of the men will point it out, if I don’t come back soon.”

Before Ben could ask another question his father was hurrying away, and the would-be recruits could do no less than remain where he had left them.

Now they had arrived at their destination, and there was no further danger of being mistaken for enemies, the boys began to realize how weary they were. Throwing themselves on the ground they speculated upon the “secret movement” which was contemplated, and more particularly as to how long they might be obliged to wait before getting something to eat.

The last of their provisions had been consumed early that morning, and *anything* eatable would have been gladly welcomed.

“If it is half as much trouble to get out of the army as it is to get in, we’re likely to be soldiers the remainder of our lives,” Ned said in as cheery a tone as he could assume, for his companions were looking most disconsolate, and he realized that something should be done to revive their drooping spirits.

“I’ve given up all hope of gettin’ a chance to enlist,” Josh said mournfully. “If you fellers, who are well equipped, ain’t thought more of, where shall I come in?”

“Father will fix everything, but I wish he had stopped to think how tired and hungry we must be. If that story hadn’t been told until later, we’d be in better shape by this time.”

“It seems as if your father thought it very important, since he couldn’t stop even to show us his tent, and we did well in telling it at the earliest possible moment——”

Before Ned had concluded his remark Lieutenant Jaffreys appeared, breathless from rapid traveling.

“You boys are to come to Colonel Scammell’s quarters at once,” he announced.

“Can’t we get something to eat first?” Ben asked, rising slowly; but his companions were on their feet in an instant.

“If you become a soldier you will soon learn to make your appetite wait on convenience,” the

officer replied with a smile. "A hungry man doesn't get much sympathy here, for all of us have been in that condition many times."

Ben's father was leading the way while speaking, and from his manner the boys understood that their information was considered valuable.

"Will Josh be allowed to enlist, even though he isn't properly equipped?" Ben asked after a few seconds, during which time he had been obliged to walk very rapidly in order to keep pace with his father.

"There will be no difficulty about anything of that kind, although from what I gathered, I don't fancy you boys will remain with the army."

"What are we to do?"

"That you will soon learn. You are to agree to whatever Colonel Scammell proposes, and it may be we shall have an opportunity to talk about home affairs before you leave."

"Are we going away?"

Lieutenant Jaffreys made no reply, but quickened his pace yet more as if to avoid further questions.

It seemed to the boys as if they had walked nearly a mile when Ben's father halted in front of a large tent, before which an armed guard paced to and fro.

"Go in, and tell your story," Lieutenant Jaffreys said, after speaking in a low tone to the sentinel.

"Aren't you coming?"

"No. I am enjoined to forget what you told me, and shall not even know the result of this interview, unless it chances that you stay with the troops."

Full of astonishment because of the strange words, the boys suffered themselves to be literally pushed forward by the sentinel, and an instant later were standing in front of several officers of high rank, as could be told by their uniform.

It was nearly a minute before Ben and Ned recognized Colonel Scammell, and then they felt more at ease as he said in a kindly tone :

“ Now, boys, one of you begin from the moment you left Portsmouth, and tell me the story of your journey. Don't omit a single detail.”

Ben turned to Ned as if to say he should act as spokesman, and the latter did as he was bidden, his memory refreshed from time to time by Josh or Ben when he slighted certain particulars.

When the story was concluded Colonel Scammell asked if they had ever seen Sim Perkins before.

“ Josh knows him,” Ned replied.

“ Then let Josh tell all he can concerning him.”

Master Higgins did not give the alleged spy a very good character, as may be supposed, but he drew a spirited word-picture of the worthy Sim and his friend Hodgkins, concluding by saying :

“ The folks 'round Bennington haven't got through with Sim, an' I don't believe he'll ever show up there again.”

The gentlemen held a brief whispered conversation, at the close of which Colonel Scammell asked :

“ Have either of you ever been in this section of the country before ?”

"Never, sir."

"Would you be afraid to undertake a long journey?"

"No, sir."

"Not if it led you very far from here?"

"We have come to enlist, sir, and are willing to do whatever may be required of us."

"But in this case I don't want you to enlist, at least not at present. It is believed that you three might find General Lafayette as handily as any messengers we could send, and there is less danger of your being condemned as spies, in event of capture, than if you belonged to the army."

"Where is General Lafayette, sir?"

"In Virginia."

The boys were bewildered for an instant at the idea of attempting so long a journey alone, and the colonel hastened to say ;

"It seems like quite an undertaking, I suppose, but is by no means as difficult as it looks. You will be provided with a small amount of money; the horses which were seized will be returned, and there is no reason why the mission cannot be performed by you even better than by any one in our command."

"I'm willin' to go anywhere," Josh said quickly; "but I'd like to know if I'll be 'lowed to enlist when we get back?"

"Once the mission has been accomplished, I promise to receive you as a recruit, and there is in the work that which may give you a commission."

“But I haven’t anything much in the way of equipments.”

“I undertake to provide all that may be needed,” the colonel said with a smile.

“Then the sooner we start the better,” Josh replied in a tone of content.

“Are you also willing?” and the colonel turned toward Ben and Ned.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply from both, and spoken so nearly together as to sound like one voice.

“Then you will start at daybreak. The horses shall be brought into camp to-night, and delivered at Lieutenant Jaffrey’s quarters. He will provide you with money, and the only instructions are to make your way to General Lafayette in the shortest possible space of time. Don’t let anything within your control detain you, but push ahead night and day. Jaffreys will give you some idea regarding the route, and as for the rest you must depend upon yourselves.”

“What are we to do after arriving there?” Ned asked.

“Tell the general of our meeting, repeat the same story you have related to us, and add these words: “Clinton will be surprised when he learns the army has gone south.” From this moment you are not to discuss these instructions even among yourselves, lest listeners should be near. Remember that your sole aim is to find the general as soon as possible, and do not speak again of this interview until you are in his presence.”

“Do you think he will pay any attention to us, if we have nothing to show who we are?” Ned asked, wholly at a loss to understand the design of this secret mission.

“At first he will naturally be suspicious, and probably subject you to rigid examination; I have no question, however, but that he will finally believe you are to be trusted. It would be in the highest degree dangerous if I gave you any credentials. Discuss with Jaffreys the best course to pursue on leaving camp, but not even to him is the message to be repeated. It is a secret mission with which you are entrusted, and we may be making a mistake to allow you to carry it; but I know what New Hampshire boys *have* done, and believe you can succeed. When we meet again I will see to it that you are allowed to become soldiers—perhaps officers, if this task is performed successfully.”

As he ceased speaking the colonel lifted the flap of his tent, and the boys could do no less than take their departure, although it seemed as if they were yet in ignorance of what was expected of them.

Fully an hour had been spent in the colonel's quarters, and when they came out no one save the sentinel was to be seen.

“Father ought to have waited for us; we shall never find his tent while it is so dark.”

“Hold on a bit, and I'll have some one here to show you the way,” the sentinel said as he halted and gave vent to a piercing whistle.

A soldier came out of the gloom a short distance

off, and without asking what was wanted, said to the boys :

“Come with me if you wish to find the lieutenant’s quarters.”

Ten minutes later the three were with Ben’s father, and before either could speak, the lieutenant asked :

“Are you to leave camp soon?”

“To-morrow morning,” Ben replied, and added eagerly, “I wish you would tell us what the colonel meant when he——”

“Stop, Ben! Unless I’m mistaken you were commanded not to discuss the subject of your interview with any one. Were you told that I could advise you in any way?”

“He said you’d tell us how we should get into Virginia——”

“Be careful of your words, my boy! Think exactly what it was the colonel said you were to talk with me about, and don’t speak of more than is absolutely necessary.

“But what is the meaning of all this secrecy?” Ben cried impatiently. “I don’t half understand what we are to do.”

“Think it over, and most likely it will seem more plain later. Now what were you told to consult me about?”

“The colonel said this:” Ned interrupted. “‘Jaffreys will give you some idea as to the route.’”

“And you are going to Virginia?”

“To find——”

“Stop!” the lieutenant cried sharply. “Do you forget what your orders were?”

“But surely we can tell *you*.”

“You must keep religiously the secret with which you were entrusted. I may have an idea of what it is owing to the fact of having first heard your story; but nothing must be told me, and remember, that once you have left this camp it may cost you your lives to even so much as intimate the direction in which you propose to travel. I suppose you will be provided with all that is necessary?”

“The colonel said you would give us some money, and the horses are to be brought here.”

“When do you leave?”

“At daylight.”

“Then lie down and try to sleep. I will attend to everything, and in the morning we will talk about the best course to be pursued.”

“But tell me this, father,” Ben cried as the lieutenant turned to leave the tent. “Is what we are to do anything so very important?”

“If you succeed you will, perhaps, be doing more for your country than any member of the army, except those high in rank. Any soldier here would gladly exchange places with you, even though the mission is probably most dangerous.”

Then the lieutenant went out, and Josh said as he wrapped a blanket carefully around him:

“I’m havin’ great luck for a feller what don’t own so much as a decent powder-horn.”

CHAPTER VI.

A PECULIAR VOICE.

Excited though the boys were with the prospect before them of a dangerous mission, from which might come rich rewards in the shape of military advancement, it was not many moments after they laid down in Lieutenant Jaffreys' tent, before all three were sleeping soundly.

Two hours later, when Ben's father returned, they did not awaken, and he set about making the necessary preparations for their departure, knowing full well how important it was they should gain all the rest possible.

It was not yet daylight when the horses and the mule were brought to the tent, and Lieutenant Jaffreys began cooking breakfast; but before much progress could be made in this task Josh was by his side.

"I didn't suppose you would waken till I had given you your full share of a sound shaking."

"I'm in the habit of turnin' out pretty early," Josh replied with a laugh. "I'm the cook of the party, an' you'd better let me tackle this job."

"Do the other boys sleep while you are doing the work?"

“Well, you see I get about it, an’ they don’t know what’s happenin’ till breakfast is ready.”

“It strikes me you’re a handy traveling companion.”

“That’s what I try to be, sir,” Josh said in a matter-of-fact tone as he assumed the duties of cook, literally forcing the lieutenant to retire. “You see a feller like me, who don’t amount to very much, has to do something to give him a recommendation.”

“There isn’t anything of that kind needed from you, my boy, judging by appearances. You seem to be the best able to command the party, and should insist on the others doing their full share of the work.”

“They’re willin’ enough, but it comes handier to me than to them. Do you think we’ll get through to Virginia all right, sir?”

“I hope so, most sincerely; there is no question but that the journey could be made without difficulty under ordinary circumstances; but as matters are, you stand a good chance of being made prisoners. Remember above all things, Josh, that you are *not* soldiers, and stick to the story through everything. A soldier found in the enemy’s lines, or near them, without a uniform, is usually considered a spy and hanged. As civilians, you will be in less danger.”

“I shan’t be likely to forget it, sir,” Josh replied as he gravely turned the corn-cake he was baking, “’specially ’bout the hangin’.”

“Talk among yourselves regarding the work to

be done as little as practicable, for no one can say when listeners may be within hearing distance."

"The colonel said we wasn't to speak of it after leavin' here."

"It is good advice, and should be followed. I have drawn a rough map of that section of the country over which you are to travel, and all hands must imprint it on their memory during the first few hours of the journey, after which it is to be destroyed, since if found about you the purpose for your going south might be guessed. Don't do anything rash, Josh, and persuade the others to keep cool if strangers attempt to force a quarrel."

Lieutenant Jaffreys continued to give Josh good advice, believing he would repeat it to his companions at fitting seasons, until breakfast was cooked, when Ben and Ned were awakened.

"Everything is ready for your departure," the lieutenant said when the boys opened their eyes. "It is essential you should leave here as soon as possible, so eat breakfast and start."

The young messengers lost no time in obeying this order, and during the meal Ben's father repeated very much of what he had said to Josh.

"Here is a small amount of money," he added as he handed a package to his son. "Too much would attract suspicion, and your work can best be accomplished by the least possible expenditure. Josh has the map; study it carefully, and before noon make certain it is so thoroughly destroyed that if the fragments were found they would betray nothing."

“Shan’t we have a chance to see General Washington?” Ben asked.

“Not now ; but if we are so fortunate as to meet again, you shall have ample opportunity. A servant will escort you to the other side of the river, and in case you are questioned as to your reasons for visiting the camp, say you wanted to enlist, but were refused because you did not have complete equipments.”

By the time Ben’s father had concluded his advice the morning meal was at an end, and the boys made ready for the journey.

Both horses and the mule were near the tent, in charge of a negro, and they mounted at once, the only leave-taking which was indulged in being a fervent clasp of the hand.

When Ben would have lingered for a few words in private with his father, the latter motioned him away, as he said in a voice which was far from steady :

“If we meet again there will be plenty of time for confidences ; but now there must be nothing in your mind but the determination to perform the mission with which you are charged.”

Josh understood that the lieutenant, realizing fully the dangers they might encounter, did not dare trust himself to take an affectionate leave of his son ; but Ben wondered not a little why his father should suddenly have grown so stern.

The negro might as well have been deaf and dumb, so far as the boys were concerned, for he

simply answered "yes" or "no" to their questions, and when they had been ferried across the river, pointed out the direction in which they must travel.

"Where had we better stop to-night?" Ned asked, thinking perhaps the old darky was acquainted with that section of the country.

"De chickens allers roos' high when the fox am 'roun'," was the sage reply, and before anything more could be said the negro was riding rapidly toward the river, he having accompanied them about half a mile from the shore.

"He doesn't count on giving words away," Ned said with a laugh. "It strikes me that every one we've seen this morning has suddenly turned glum. If we are treated so curtly by those who should be friends, what kind of a show will we stand among enemies?"

"We must take precious good care not to mix up with that kind," Josh said with a cheery laugh. "We ought to get quite a bit on our road without havin' very great dealin's with anybody. The first thing just now, though, is to study the map, and then destroy it accordin' to instructions, so let's begin."

Ben's father had traced nearly a straight course for the young messengers from King's Ferry to Baltimore, and thence to Richmond in Virginia.

There was but little attempt at map-making. The names of the towns, with the distance between each, were jotted down in their regular order, but nothing more.

“It don’t take long to get the whole of that in a feller’s head,” Josh said after he had studied the paper a few moments in silence. “I reckon I’ve seen enough of it.”

Ned had soon committed it to memory, and when Ben finished his portion of the task the paper was torn into tiny fragments, or chewed until it was simply a mass of pulp.

During this time of study the boys rode at a leisurely pace, but when the document had served its purpose, Josh said gravely:

“We can’t afford to go along haphazard, in this fashion, or we may find our journey’ll end mighty sudden. I take it that we need to get as far from New York by sunset as possible, so let’s give the beasts about twenty miles before noon, and as much after dinner.”

“Can they stand it?”

“If they can’t the sooner we know it the better. It’s a long pull from here to——”

“Hold on, Josh!” Ned interrupted. “Don’t forget that we must never mention, even to ourselves, the end of the journey.”

“That’s a fact, an’ I came mighty nigh bein’ the first to break the rule. Say, we ought to have some answer ready in case we are cornered and questioned. Where are we going?”

“Why not say Philadelphia?”

“All right, Philadelphia it is; but why are we going there?”

“To get work.

“What kind?”

“You’ve got me now; I haven’t any idea.”

“We must also agree upon a story as to where we came from, and all that sort of thing,” Josh added. “Now if we should be brought up with a round turn, Ned had better do the talkin’, an’ the others hold their tongues.”

“You are the best one to tackle that job. Fix up a story to suit yourself; tell us what it is, and then stick to it when you’re questioned,” Ned said decidedly, and Ben appeared perfectly satisfied Josh should be elected spokesman of the party.

Master Higgins did not seem to think it necessary he should concoct his story immediately, but at once spurred the mule to a gait which taxed the abilities of the horses to equal.

During two hours they rode at a sharp trot, and in that time no one was seen who seemed disposed to molest them.

Then Josh halted, and after advising that they give the animals a breathing spell of half an hour, flung himself on the grass in the shade of some trees, and was apparently asleep before his companions had fairly dismounted.

At the end of the stated time he awakened, to the surprise of Ben and Ned, who were watching to learn if he would oversleep the proposed number of moments, and the hurried journey was resumed.

Three times before nightfall did Josh repeat these maneuvers, and Ned said in surprise, when they began the last stage of that day’s ride:

“I can’t understand how you fall asleep so quickly, or, once having done so, how it is possible to awaken whenever you wish.”

“I don’t know myself, except that it’s a habit I’ve got, an’ it will come in mighty handy while we’re on this business. Have you fellers kept your eyes open all day?”

“Every moment.”

“Well, you had a good night’s rest, so it doesn’t make so much matter; but you must learn to catch sleep whenever there’s a chance. Now we’ll try to get along without talkin’ till we find a haltin’ place for the night. Come on,” and Josh urged the mule to a rapid pace once more.

The sun was hanging low in the heavens when the boys arrived at a small settlement consisting of three log houses, and prudence dictated that they should stop for the night, since the animals showed evident signs of exhaustion.

“If we can get corn here, I think we’d better pull up till mornin’,” Josh said as he allowed the mule to slacken her pace to a walk.

“I thought it was decided we’d sleep in the woods,” Ben replied.

“That should only be done when we have grain for the horses. If we got some here, and rode on, it might be dark before we found a halting-place where there’s plenty of water. We’ve traveled hard on to fifty miles since mornin’, an’ the animals need all the comfort we can give them.”

The possibility of sleeping in a bed once more

was not to be slighted by such weary travelers, and Josh was allowed to arrange matters to please himself.

Riding in advance he stopped at the first building, and in a few moments had made arrangements for food and lodgings.

The tired steeds were stabled, rubbed down well, and, with a generous supper before them, were left to the needed repose, while their masters went into the house in search of as good accommodations.

The head of the family was not at home ; but his wife, who appeared well able to conduct the business, agreed to provide the boys with supper and breakfast at a modest sum. She would charge them nothing for sleeping in the house, because of the fact that she could not provide them with beds.

“We’d jest as soon stay in the barn on the hay,” Josh suggested, and the good woman accepted the proposition with alacrity.

“You’ll be more comfortable there than here on the floor, an’ it will save me a sight of trouble.”

Thus the place of sleeping was decided upon, and when the young messengers had partaken of a plain but well-cooked supper, and paid their bill in advance, they sought such repose as was to be found on the haymow, for neither of the party cared to sit up any longer than was absolutely necessary.

Josh fell asleep instantly he was stretched out at full length, and the others were not many moments in following his example.

It seemed to Ben as if he had but just dropped

into unconsciousness, although as events proved he must have been wrapped in slumber several hours, when he was aroused by loud voices outside the barn.

Before he was fairly awake it seemed as if the speaker must be an acquaintance, and when once fully alive to all the surroundings his excitement was most intense.

“We’ll put up with any kind of accommodations, eh?” the person on the outside was saying, probably to the woman of the house. “We’ve been ridin’ since daybreak, an’ a man can’t choose his bed at sich a time, eh?”

The peculiarity of the terminations of the sentences, as well as the tone of the voice, told him at once that the newcomer was none other than Sim Perkins, and he was the one man above all others it was necessary they should avoid a meeting with.

Turning quickly he was about to waken Josh, when that young gentleman said in a quiet, matter-of-fact way :

“It’s all right; my eyes are open.”

“But Sim Perkins is out there!”

“I knew it was him before you woke up.”

“We mustn’t let him see us.”

“That’s true.”

The calmness of Josh irritated Ben, and he asked almost angrily :

“Are you going to lay there till he tumbles over us?”

“I don’t count on rushin’ out into his arms.

There's nothin' for us but to wait till we know what he's goin' to do."

"But suppose he comes in here?"

"That's what I reckon he *will* do, and then is the time for us to make a move."

Now Ned was awakened, and he displayed quite as much fear as did Ben, when he learned who the newcomers were.

In the meantime the conversation on the outside had been continued until the woman of the house promised to give the travelers lodging, and then the men could be heard coming toward the stable.

"What are we to do?" Ned whispered nervously.

"We'll lay still, an' trust to the chance that they won't see us."

"But they'll know the horses."

"Perhaps, though it's dark, an' even if Sim sees 'em, he'll most likely wait till mornin' before doin' much. At all events, our best plan is to lay low till we're obliged to show ourselves. Be ready to make a break if it becomes necessary," and Josh pulled his musket closer to his side.

The men were already fumbling at the wooden latch of the door, and before either of the boys could have descended from the mow, entered the building.

It was very dark inside the barn, and Sim, with a companion whom the boys believed to be Hodgkins, was forced to grope his way around the floor in order to find accommodations for the horses.

"The stalls appear to be full," he grumbled after

a short time of searching. "I reckon we'd better turn their beasts out, an' put ours in, eh?"

"What's the use of all that bother?" Hodgkins growled. "I'll guarantee mine will stand quiet enough in the floor. Pull down a lot of hay, an' let it go at that."

"I reckon there's grain somewhere about, eh?"

"What if there is? The hosses are too warm to be fed now, an' I don't allow to set up waitin' for 'em to cool off."

"Perhaps it'll be as well to give 'em a big feed in the mornin', eh?"

"Of course," and Hodgkins began to pull hay from the mow, barely missing Ned's leg as he thrust blindly around with a fork.

"You've got enough, eh?" Sim said petulantly after his friend had worked several moments without accomplishing very much. "It don't lack more'n an hour of midnight, an' seein's how we must be on the road ag'in by sunrise, we can't afford to spend all the night here, eh?"

"I don't see why you're in sich a rush. There's plenty of time to get there without ridin' ourselves into skeletons. Why not take matters easy?"

"Because somethin's goin' on at the rebel camp that looks suspicious, an' I want to be at work before the move is made, eh?"

"Still on the same old yarn," Hodgkins grumbled. "I can't see what it is you've found that's so important. If we're goin' south, it won't make much difference to us what Washington's figgerin' on."

General Clinton will keep *him* from strayin' very far."

"That's true enough, but if we take the news with us of some move, an' it really happens, we'll stand jest so much the better with them we count on workin', eh? Come on, do you want to pull the whole mow down?"

Hodgkins followed his leader out of the barn, the door was carefully closed and fastened, and the sound of footsteps told that the men had gone into the house.

"That's what I call a close shave," Ben said with a sigh of relief, as he assumed a sitting posture; but Josh pulled him back at once.

"The danger ain't over yet by considerable. If the woman tells Sim there are three boys here, he may have wit enough to look us over. Keep quiet a spell longer, an' don't talk louder than a whisper."

The young messengers listened intently, neither caring to indulge in conversation until positive the men would not return to the barn before morning, and when half an hour had elapsed, Josh said in a guarded tone:

"I reckon we're safe enough till daybreak, an' now you fellers better get some more sleep."

"What are *you* going to do?" Ned asked.

"Keep awake till it's time to start. We'll give the animals as much of a rest as is safe, an' then light out."

"There won't be any danger of their following if we take all the horses," Ben suggested.

“You’re right; but if that was done they might suspect we were on the same road, which is something I wouldn’t like to have happen while there are so many miles ahead of us.”

“Do you intend to leave here without doing anything to prevent pursuit?” Ned asked in surprise.

“I don’t think it will be safe to do anything. The woman has been paid for the supper we had and the breakfast we shan’t get, so there’s nothin’ to prevent us from goin’ when we please.”

“But I don’t like the idea of their being behind us.”

“Neither do I; but it doesn’t seem to me there is anything else we can do. Of course I don’t want to say what shall or shan’t be done, when you fellers think different, so kinder turn the thing over, an’ if you finally say we’re to take their hosses, or try to stop ’em in any way, why I’ll do my share without grumblin’.”

The more Ben and Ned revolved the matter in their minds the more difficult was it to decide which was the wisest course. Safety seemed to demand that the spies be checked in their journey, by some means, and yet both realized how dangerous it would be to do that which might cause the men to suspect they also were traveling south.

Although Sim Perkins was not an intellectually brilliant man, he would be extremely dull if he failed to understand that something unusual was on foot, to send the boys away from the forces they had been so eager to join.

Once Sim suspected anything of the kind he would spare nothing which might enable him to overtake them, and with such a man tracking them down, their chances of ever arriving at the destination decided upon would be extremely small.

"I'll give in," Ned said after a long time of silence. "It seems tough to leave here without trying to cripple those fellows; but Josh is right when he says it is dangerous to attempt anything of the kind."

Ben had arrived at a similar opinion, and added:

"Now we've settled what's to be done, let's get some sleep. Josh says he's intending to keep awake, and there's no need of more than one sentinel."

Half an hour later the two were wrapped in slumber, and Josh had crept softly down from the mow to the door, in order that he might see the first signs of coming dawn.

When an hour had passed he gave the horses more corn, and while they were eating, strapped on the saddles.

There was hardly a perceptible difference in the gloom when he awakened his comrades.

"The sun will rise in an hour," he whispered. "The hosses are harnessed, an' I reckon we may as well turn their animals loose before we start. When the woman tells 'em there were three fellers in the barn, they'll think we left the door open carelessly, an' the beasts got out in that way."

The boys moved as silently as possible; but it

was out of the question to get the horses from the building without some noise.

The steeds ridden by Sim and Hodgkins were led a short distance from the stable, and the boys were in the act of mounting their own horses when they heard a familiar voice exclaim :

“There they go! It is them fellers what sneaked back their hosses! And you think you know so much, Sim Perkins!”

It was Bart Hodgkins who spoke, and Josh whispered nervously :

“We’re discovered, an’ it’s time to show what these beasts can do!”

CHAPTER VII.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

AS AFFAIRS had turned, the boys would have been in no worse position had they done everything possible to cripple the spies, and Josh appeared to be the first to recognize this, for Ned heard him mutter as he urged the mule to a swift pace :

“I was so afraid we’d be discovered that I let our best chance go by! If we’d taken their horses there wouldn’t be any need of a very great race. Now the spies not only know which way we’re headin’, but are in good condition to give chase!”

“Don’t think of what might have been done,” Ned cried cheerily. “You did what we all thought was for the best, and the matter can’t be changed now.”

“At the same time a feller knows when he makes a fool of himself,” Josh replied, using his whip with vigor, and from that moment until an hour had elapsed there was little opportunity for conversation.

Josh held his steed back at times, that he might not outstrip his comrades, while Ben and Ned spurred their horses to the best possible pace.

After an hour of this mad riding a halt became

necessary, and the leader said, as he drew rein by the side of a small stream :

“I reckon it will pay us to give the beasts a breathin’-spell. We’ve been ridin’ faster than most likely the spies have, an’ probably it took ’em quite awhile to get under way.”

“Do you allow to tire them out?” Ben asked as he removed the saddle to bathe the back of his horse.

“Not a bit of it, ’cause it can’t be done. From what Sim said last night, we know they suspect there is somethin’ goin’ on out of the reg’lar course at General Washington’s camp, an’ now, most likely, they believe we’re concerned in it. Them men will ride at our heels till one party or the other is done up. Sim Perkins is a masterhand at such work, so I’ve been told.”

“What is to be done? Keep straight on, and trust that our nags will show the best speed?”

“That seems to be the only chance, unless we meet somebody who can show us a short cut across country, where it may be possible to give them the slip. We’ll do our best in the way of travelin’ to-day, an’ by night shall be in better condition to decide about the future.”

At the expiration of fifteen minutes Josh proposed that they continue the flight, and once more the boys were riding at a sharp gallop.

Three halts were made before noon, and then they had arrived at a small inn, where, as was shown by the swinging sign, might be procured “entertainment for man and beast.”

There could be no question as to the wisdom in giving the already weary horses a hearty dinner, and, without previous consultation, the boys halted in front of the house.

Instead of trusting the steeds to the mercy of the hostler, the young messengers gave them their personal attention, and not until the animals had been well cared for did they enter the inn.

The only attendant to be seen was a short, red-faced man who acted the part of landlord, and in reply to Josh's questions he "reckoned" they could have dinner there, "pervidin' the money was showed up fust."

Once the boys had satisfied his mind in this respect, he was particularly civil and inquisitive.

"Ridin' far?" he asked, after having given the necessary orders to some one in an adjoining room.

"Only to Philadelphia," Josh replied carelessly.

"Business?"

"Yes."

"Ain't thinkin' of 'listin', eh?"

"If we had anything of that kind in our heads, we wouldn't be leavin' home. There are some in this country who may not want to stand up an' be shot at by the king's men."

"So you're tryin' to keep out of a uniform, eh?" and the man laughed as if there was something very comical in the idea.

Josh did not reply, and the landlord believed he had as guests three able-bodied youths who were afraid to join the army.

Then Josh began to ask questions relative to the route, and the man told him of a road through the woods which would save four miles in distance, but hardly any time, owing to its exceeding roughness.

“If you’re in no pertic’lar hurry, an’ want to spare your beasts, turn to the left at the next cross-roads,” the landlord said. “There ain’t many as uses it; but the time’s comin’ when it’ll be the best traveled.”

“Where can we put up for the night?”

“You’ll find inns enough on the road from here out.”

“But this woods road,” Ned interrupted. “How far must we ride before coming out on the highway?”

“It’s a longish bit, I allow—say twenty miles.”

“And we must travel that distance before striking an inn?”

“Well, yes, it’ll amount to ’bout that, I reckon.”

At this point dinner was announced, and the boys sat down to a generous, although not very tempting meal, the first since the night previous.

Once Ben began to talk of the afternoon’s journey, but a warning look from Josh reduced him to silence. The less they spoke of their own affairs, the safer for them while among strangers.

When dinner was finished, and the boys certainly ate as much as was paid for, Josh bargained for a bushel of corn and three bags, the grain to be divided into as many portions.

“Countin’ to stop on the road to-night?” the

landlord asked, when this part of the business had been transacted.

“We shall most likely ride late, an’ by takin’ some grain it won’t make much of any difference if we don’t find an inn when it comes supper-time,” Master Higgins replied, and then he turned his attention to saddling the horses, although the landlords howed plainly that he would be well pleased if they lingered, since his budget of questions was far from exhausted.

The noon halt was prolonged to nearly two hours, and all three of the travelers felt they had spent more time than was wise, although the horses needed a much longer rest than had been obtained, if they were to be in condition for hard work.

In order that the inquisitive landlord’s suspicions might not be aroused, the boys departed leisurely, allowing the animals to jog along until they were beyond sight of the inn.

It was necessary to ride half a mile in this manner, and Josh took advantage of the opportunity to unfold his plans.

“We’ll strike into the road he told about, an’ if the horses give out we can camp in the woods; accordin’ to my way of thinkin’, we’ve patronized hotels enough. After this we must buy grain from the farmers, even though we are forced to tote it half a day, as in this case.”

“It’s the present which troubles me,” Ned said grimly. “Sim and Hodgkins can’t be so very far behind by this time, and on arriving at the inn

they'll have no difficulty in ascertaining where we've gone."

"You're right; but don't forget that their hosses must be even more tired than ours, since they didn't have as long a rest last night, an' it won't be possible to give us a very hot chase."

"Do you count on throwing them off the scent by going through the woods?"

"Not a bit of it. They'll be sure to inquire whether we asked any questions about the road, an' the landlord'll tell 'em all he did us."

"Why not keep on the highway? They will naturally suppose we went through the woods, and we shall be separated for a while."

"It wouldn't do a great deal of good, since at the end of twenty miles they'll be either ahead or behind us, and the trouble is that we shan't know which. I reckon on keepin' posted as to what they do, in order to help ourselves."

"Do you know, we ought not attempt to ride more than twenty miles further?" Ben said. "I'm certain my horse can't stand a longer journey."

"This mule could jog eighty miles without turnin' a hair, 'cordin' to the way she acts now," Josh said with a laugh; "but I reckon your hosses have done pretty nigh a day's work. We'll pull up somewhere in the woods."

"The travelers were beyond view of the inquisitive landlord by this time, and Josh quickened the pace, thus putting an end to the conversation.

With a view to husbanding the strength of the

horses, the boys rode about five miles and then halted, as during the forenoon, while Josh set a moderate pace when they were in motion.

Three times had this been done, and the young messengers concluded they were nearing the end of the most wretched road to be found in any section of the country. It was hardly more than a wide path through the woods, obstructed here and there by fallen trees or huge boulders that had rolled down the hillsides during times of freshets.

It would have been impossible to travel very fast over such a course, and Josh said disconsolately when the third halt was made :

“ We’re payin’ a pretty high price for a chance to camp. Such goin’ as this fags the hosses more’n twice that distance over a good road would, an’ I’m beginnin’ to think comin’ across here is my second mistake to-day.”

“ What was the first one ?” Ned asked.

“ Leavin’ Sim’s hosses when we started this mornin’ ; but then,” he added half to himself, “ we couldn’t keep stealin’ all the way along without findin’ ourselves brought up by a round turn at some time.”

“ I wouldn’t worry about mistakes,” Ned said cheerily. “ It isn’t to be expected we’ll go through without making some, and it’s best to err on what seems the safest side. The worst of camping in the woods is going to be the lack of food for ourselves, and just now that bothers me more than anything else.”

“I brought away plenty of corn cake from the hotel, an’ it’ll go hard if we can’t get a rabbit or partridge before sunset. I believe the——”

Josh ceased speaking very suddenly, bent close to the ground for an instant, and then looked up quickly at his companions.

“What’s the matter?” Ben asked nervously.

“Sim an’ Hodgkins are comin’. Listen, an’ you’ll hear their hosses flounderin’ over the rocks.”

“Then we ought to be off,” Ben said as he ran toward his panting steed.

“It wouldn’t be any use to try that game,” Josh replied decidedly. “We’ll strike into the woods an’ trust to the chance of their goin’ past without suspectin’ what we’ve done.”

Ned had already conceived the same plan, and was running down the path seeking for an opening in the thicket.

“Here’s a show to get through,” he called in a low tone, and five minutes later the young messengers were crouched among the foliage, an hundred yards or more from the road, listening intently for those sounds which would tell that the pursuers had ridden on without suspecting their intended victims were so near.

They were too far away to hear any conversation the men might indulge in; but the noise made by the animals as they stumbled over the rough road told of their progress.

“We’re all right for a spell,” Josh whispered triumphantly as the sounds proclaimed that the

spies had passed the point at which the horses entered the woods. "I thought Sim Perkins was sharper than to let such a trick be played on him."

"Don't crow too soon," Ned said in the same cautious tone. "It won't be long before they discover that there is no trail."

It was destined the pursuers should be informed of the true state of affairs even sooner than Ned fancied, for at that moment the mule gave vent to one of her resounding brays which might readily have been heard a quarter of a mile away.

Josh sprang to the animal's side as if to prevent a repetition of the outcry, but came back to his companions a few seconds later, as he said grimly:

"I don't reckon it makes any difference *now* how much she yells, for Sim would be deaf if he didn't hear that shriek."

"What's to be done?" Ben asked in dismay. "They'll come here, of course, and we're bound to have a row."

"I don't see how it can be helped," Josh replied thoughtfully. "It's too late to try to get into the path without bein' seen, an' it wouldn't be safe to push further into the woods, even if there was a chance of givin' them the slip by that means, which doesn't seem likely."

"There's no question but that Sim will seize our horses, on the pretext that they were stolen from him, and if that happens we might as well turn back at once," Ned said gloomily.

"He won't take the mule," and Josh looked to the

priming of his musket. "I've had orders to go to a certain place, an' so long as there's a bullet in my pouch Sim Perkins shan't do anything to stop me."

"Do you mean to fight?" and Ben looked surprised.

"There's nothin' else for us to do, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'. You know what your father would advise, if he was here."

This suggestion served to give Ben new courage, and he also examined his weapon.

Already could the men be heard forcing their way through the underbrush, and the instant Josh caught a glimpse of them he shouted:

"Halt where you are, Sim Perkins, or I'll put a bullet through you!"

"So you've turned highwayman as well as hoss thief, eh?" Sim cried mockingly; but he was very careful to obey the command.

The boys were hidden from view by the foliage, therefore the spies could not open battle with a hope of success.

"It don't make any difference what I turned, so long as I don't want your company. There are three of us here, an' each one can see his target. I promise that all hands will fire if you come a single step nearer!"

"You're carryin' matters with a pretty high hand, young feller, an' it may be you're makin' a mistake."

"Yes, things are apt to turn out different from what we expect," Josh replied mockingly, "as most

likely you'll learn when you try to persuade folks you're an honest man."

There was no reply to this; but the spies changed their position, and it was no longer possible for the boys to see them.

"Are they creeping up on us?" Ben whispered nervously.

"Most likely," Josh replied quietly; "but it'll be kinder tough for either one that I get a sight of, if he comes any nearer."

During the next ten minutes the boys listened intently, but not a sound could be heard, save when the mule lifted up her voice in salutation to the animals ridden by the spies.

Suddenly the crack of a musket rang out, followed by a commotion among the horses, and Ben said with a mirthless laugh:

"They don't shoot very well; I didn't so much as hear the bullet."

"An' good reason for it!" Josh cried excitedly. "The sneaks are tryin' to kill our beasts! They count on crippin' us so we can't keep on, an' then slippin' off without a scratch."

"Much good that will do them. I don't believe they'd risk their skins simply for revenge."

"Revenge? It's safety they're after. So long as we can follow at as good a pace as they, it's possible for us to spoil any game they may try to play, an' at a time when discovery might mean a halter for both."

Ben and Ned now understood to what lengths

the spies would go in order to insure their own safety, and neither could repress a shudder of apprehension at the thought that the odds were in favor of the men just then.

“I’m goin’ to move the hosses further back in the woods,” Josh whispered. “You two are to stay here an’ keep the sharpest kind of a sharp watch. Shoot if you have the chance to draw a bead, an’ shoot to kill, for that’s what they’ll do.”

He crept cautiously back toward where the animals had been left, and his companions could not but admire his courage, for he was proceeding directly toward that part of the thicket where the spies would be best able to shoot him down.

There was no time to watch Josh. Their own lives depended upon the strictness of the guard they kept, and both boys sat silent and almost motionless, their eyes glancing quickly from point to point.

Therefore it was that when the report of a musket was heard, followed almost immediately by a cry of pain, they did not know who had fired, or who was wounded.

“Are you all right, Josh?” Ned asked in a low tone, without turning his head.

There was another report, and Master Higgins replied quietly:

“There’s nothin’ the matter with me; but Bart Hodgkins has got somethin’ of mine in his shoulder.” He paused an instant, and then added in a louder tone, “Come on, boys, I can see both the villains! Hurry, an’ you’ll get a shot!”

“Why don’t *you* fire?” Ned asked as he and Ben quickly obeyed the summons.

“Because my gun ain’t loaded. Hurry, an’ you’ll get a shot at Sim!”

Josh had hardly ceased speaking when the other boys were by his side; but the favorable opportunity to cripple their enemy had passed.

Sim, understanding that the tables were turned, and that he was now the hunted instead of the hunter, darted behind a tree, dragging Bart with him.

He was in a position from which he could neither advance nor retreat without the certainty of becoming a target for the three boys, and Josh could not restrain his exultation.

“The old fox is trapped at last, an’ I’ve had a hand in doin’ it!” he cried gleefully, while from behind his shelter Sim screamed in a rage:

“I’ll have your heart’s blood some day, to pay for this, you young whelp!”

“So long as you can’t have it now, I ain’t very much worried. I’m goin’ to set right here with my finger on the trigger, an’ at the first move you make, will put an end to your spyin’!” Then, keeping his eyes fixed upon the tree which hid Sim from view, he beckoned Ben and Ned to his side, whispering when they had obeyed, “Now’s your chance to make up for my mistake this mornin’. You two lead our hosses back into the path, get the ones Sim an’ Hodgkins rode, an’ be ready to make a quick start when I come out of the bushes.”

“He’d shoot you before you could run so far.”

“That’s a chance I’ve got to take; but my gun’s loaded now. It’ll be dark mighty soon, an’ then he’ll easily get off, so what’s done must be hurried.”

The boys did not wait to argue. He had already shown his ability as a leader, and neither hesitated about obeying him.

As a means of distracting Sim’s attention from any noise they might make, Josh began shouting derisively at the man, reminding him from time to time that he would soon be in a worse condition than Hodgkins, and the spy became so angry that he could not refrain from replying.

Therefore it is possible that neither of the men had any suspicions of what was being done until Josh, who concluded sufficient time had elapsed for his commands to be executed, suddenly started at full speed toward the road.

Ben and Ned, each mounted and holding one of the spies’ horses by the bridle, were waiting the appearance of their comrade.

“Ride on the best you know how!” Josh cried as he seized the bridle of the mule. “I’ll hang behind a bit to make certain Sim don’t have a chance to shoot!”

“Be careful of yourself!” Ned cried as he urged his horse forward. “There’s no need to take risks, now we’ve got the best of ’em.”

Josh waited until a crashing of the underbrush told of Sim’s whereabouts, and then he fired in that direction, mounting the next instant.

It was rather too dangerous to stop for the purpose of ascertaining if his chance shot had taken effect. Ben and Ned were already hidden from view in the distance, and he spurred the mule to a sudden burst of speed.

Not until they had emerged from the rocky path on to the highway would Josh allow his companions to slacken the pace, and then he said :

“I reckon we can pull up a bit now. It must be six miles from here to the place where we left them fellers, an’ with Bart wounded as he is, they won’t travel very fast.”

“How far are we to tow these nags?”

“Till we settle down for the night. Of course we don’t want to carry ’em off ; but we’ll take precious good care Sim Perkins can’t get his hands on either for a spell.”

“Did you hit when you fired last?”

“I guess not. He was hid in the bushes, an’ I allowed it wouldn’t be healthy for me to wait till he showed himself. Say, don’t you reckon he’s ragin’ ’bout this time?”

“He has good cause for almost anything in that line,” Ned replied with a hearty laugh. “Say, Josh, if we *do* get through this journey all right, you must have the entire credit.”

“I don’t deserve it ; I’m havin’ some terrible good luck just now, an’ that accounts for what’s happenin’.”

CHAPTER VIII.

SWAPPING HORSES.

BELIEVING it would be impossible for the spies to overtake them, the young messengers rode leisurely along, as was necessary they should do in view of the exhausted condition of the horses.

Ned's steed appeared more nearly winded than the others, and as the journey was continued he staggered from side to side, until the rider said as he came to a halt:

"It's no use to think of going further with this horse, until after he's had a long rest. He has grown more tired in the last half hour than during the hot ride of the morning."

"But he hasn't been pushed hard since dinner," and Ben gazed at the animal critically.

"I know it, and yet look at him; it seems as if he could hardly keep on his feet."

Josh had given no particular attention to either of the animals since having left the spies behind; but he now examined Ned's steed carefully.

"Take the saddle off," he said, as the rider dismounted. "The hoss isn't winded by travelin', an' I reckon you'll find that Sim's bullet struck him. The beasts made a great fuss when the shot was

fired, but I allowed at the time that it was only because of the noise."

Ben and Ned both looked the horse over; but without discovering any wound until the saddle had been removed, and then everything was explained.

A bullet had passed through the saddle-cloth, striking the poor beast between the ribs, and the only wonder was that he had managed to travel so far.

"There's no hope for him," Josh said in a tone of regret. "Better take off the bridle before he drops, an' now it's a case of usin' Sim's hoss. It's only a swap, an' he gets the beast he's marked."

Ned was decidedly affected by the fate of the animal which had been a pet of his, and Josh understood that there was danger of his giving way to grief if they remained to see the steed die.

"Better him, than one of us," he said sharply. "War ain't a very fine thing when the killin' part is shown up, an' I don't really suppose its right to feel so bad 'bout a hoss while hundreds of human bein's are wiped out with more cruel wounds than this. The kindest thing you can do, Ned, is to send a bullet into his brain."

"I reckon you're right, but I can't do it. He and I have been together so long we're old friends; that horse seemed to know when I was unhappy at home, and did his best to cheer me. I haven't the heart to kill him."

"You mustn't let such thoughts come into your head while there's so much for us to do," and now

Josh spoke more sharply. "Put your saddle an' bridle on Sim's hoss, an' ride ahead. I'll overtake you in a few minutes."

Ned harnessed the spy's steed in silence. Then approaching the wounded animal, he kissed the velvet-like muzzle, and turned quickly away.

Josh and Ben both understood and respected his grief. The latter rode by his side while the former remained behind, and a few moments later the report of a musket-shot told that the faithful animal was no longer in misery.

When Josh overtook his companions he was careful not to refer to what had been done, but said gruffly:

"We can't afford to loaf 'round here. It stands us in hand to find a haltin' place before dark, an' I don't feel jest easy 'bout stayin' so near Sim."

"Do you count on his being able to follow on foot, while Hodgkins is wounded, as far as we have come already?" Ben asked.

"It's jest possible he might leave Bart behind for a spell, an' push ahead in the hope of findin' us. We'll ride half a dozen miles more, an' then pull up."

Master Higgins took the lead, and the young messengers rode at a brisk trot an hour longer, when Josh turned aside into a thick grove of hemlock.

Bart's horse had been brought thus far, but it was not Josh's purpose to keep him any longer, for he would only retard their progress when the journey was resumed next day.

Little time was spent in making preparations for the night. The air was warm and balmy, therefore the boys needed only such a shelter as would protect them from the heavy dews, and this was ready at hand in the low-hanging branches of the trees.

As a matter of course no grass grew in the grove, but the grain which had been brought so far afforded a supply of food for three of the horses, and the fourth was turned loose to forage for himself.

Josh produced the corn cake he brought from the inn, and although it had been broken and crumbled almost as fine as before the meal was cooked, the boys ate it with a relish such as only hunger can give.

That night Josh insisted a watch should be kept, although his companions believed such a precaution useless.

"It won't be so very hard for either of us, 'cause we'll stay on duty only an hour at a time."

"But why do even that?" Ben asked petulantly. "It isn't possible Sim can overtake us between now and morning, and we need all the sleep we can get."

"It's best to be on the safe side. We have already had considerable proof of how easily we might be stopped on the journey, and I think we'd better follow Josh's advice," Ned said decidedly. "I'll stand the first watch, and you need not be awakened until after bottling up two full hours of sleep."

Josh seemed to consider that this settled the

matter, for he immediately laid down under a tree, and, as usual, was soon slumbering soundly.

Nothing occurred to cause alarm during the night, however, and when morning came once more the journey was resumed as soon as it was sufficiently light to discern surrounding objects.

After riding three or four miles they arrived at a house where breakfast was procured, and then, their minds set at rest regarding the possibilities of being overtaken by Sim, the young messengers rode at a rapid pace until noon.

During the ensuing eight days nothing occurred to break the monotony of the journey.

The country through which they traveled was so thickly settled that there was no difficulty in procuring food for themselves and steeds, and, as Josh said, that which had promised to be such a dangerous journey, had "settled down into a reg'lar pleasure trip."

At Philadelphia they remained one night at a hotel, but no halt was made in Baltimore, through which they passed during the early part of the day.

No difficulty was experienced in crossing the Potomac River, since they were on the highway, and the ferryman did not appear to think it strange three boys should be traveling alone.

Nearly all whom they talked with professed to be devoted to the Colonial cause, and information regarding the course to Richmond was readily imparted.

Young men from different portions of the country had preceded them to join Lafayette's forces, and the inhabitants saw nothing strange in three able-bodied youths doing the same service for their country.

The boys were told of sixty young men from the vicinity of Fredericksburg, who brought with them not only uniforms, arms and ammunition, but horses as well, when they enlisted under Lafayette, and the people spoke in terms of greatest admiration of the Baltimore Troop of Light Dragoons, which had volunteered when men were sorely needed.

As the young messengers neared the Pamunkey River they heard more of General Cornwallis' movements, and every one with whom they talked warned them to have a care lest Tarleton, who had terrorized the country by his dashing raids, should capture them.

There was no longer any reason to conceal their purpose. Josh boldly announced that they were on their way to join the gallant French officer who had given his services to the struggling colonists, and wherever such fact was announced food and shelter was provided freely. No payment was exacted by the inhabitants, save when the boys stopped at an hotel, and they oftentimes carried from a halting-place sufficient in the way of provisions to serve them twenty-four hours.

The steeds, generously fed and carefully attended, were in good condition to answer readily the calls made by their riders, and the travelers advanced rapidly.

“If we get any praise for doin’ this kind of a job, it’ll be what we don’t deserve,” Josh said the second morning after they left Bowling Green. “Except for the work of remainin’ in the saddle day after day, it’s no more than sport.”

“It wasn’t when we first started,” Ben replied with a laugh.

“That was because the crop of Tories is bigger up our way; down here nearly everybody is ready to yell himself hoarse in honor of General Lafayette,” Josh replied.

“Unless we are precious careful from this out, we shall find ourselves among those who don’t give the French officer much honor,” Ned said grimly. “We are getting uncomfortably near General Cornwallis’ forces, and perhaps we’d better not do too much crowing until we are certain we shan’t fall into his clutches.”

“Before night we should pass through New Castle, where the king’s troops were last May, according to the stories the people tell, and it is just possible we may find them there again,” Ben suggested, but Josh did not believe there was any reason for alarm.

“We have been told that we’d find General Lafayette somewhere on the Pamunkey River, an’ if he’s so near there isn’t much chance Cornwallis can be in this section.”

“Why not?” Ned asked. “The Colonial forces are not strong enough to give him battle, as he well knows, and we may suddenly find ourselves between two fires.”

“In that case our proper course is to steer clear of the redcoats, an’ do our best to help the Colonials.”

When the boys halted on this night it was at a farmhouse, where they learned that General Lafayette’s army was following down the course of the river, and twelve hours of hard riding should bring them to the American camp.

It was rumored that the English forces had returned to Yorktown, after an absence of only three weeks, and, if such information could be relied upon, the mission of the New Hampshire boys was well-nigh accomplished.

When they set out at an early hour next morning Josh was in the highest spirits. Riders and horses were in good condition for the day’s work, and by nightfall he believed the information which Colonel Scammell had sent to General Lafayette would be delivered.

“It won’t be long now before we’re reg’lar soldiers!” he cried triumphantly as the three rode side by side at a sharp pace. “If we haven’t had luck since the day Sim Perkins stole your hosses, I don’t know what to call it, an’ I’m the one what gets the most out of this job!”

“How do you figure that?” Ned asked laughingly.

“Why, I hadn’t anything when I started—before we got the mule, I mean—an’ when we enlist you can’t be more of a soldier than I am, so I’ve gained everything, even to a mule and equipment.”

“I don’t believe we shall find it very easy to

make the French officer credit our story. In that case it may be some time before you are in the ranks."

"I shall be with the American army, at all events, an' that's a long ways ahead of scurryin' 'round the country at risk of bein' picked up by a tory like Sim Perkins, or a Britisher like Tarleton."

"Sim hasn't done much picking up lately. I wonder where he is by this time?"

"It's likely he went to New York. He couldn't travel far without hosses, an' I reckon Bart was hurt so bad he won't feel like ridin' much for quite a spell."

"Then you believe we've seen the last of Sim?"

"Yes, unless we stay down here a long while. It'll take him a good many days to get this far alone."

Josh was so confident there was no longer any reason to fear the spy that the other boys dismissed the matter from their minds entirely.

It is true they had not been troubling themselves about Sim during these last few days, but now, they were so near the American lines, it was but natural to at least give him a passing thought.

As they progressed, more definite information regarding General Lafayette's forces was obtained, and when, just at sunset, they were halted by a scouting force of twenty men, their happiness was complete.

"Hurrah!" Josh cried as the command was heard. "We've done it at last, an' now who can stop us from enlistin'?"

“Who are you?” the leader of the party asked when the young messengers were surrounded by the troopers.

“Boys from New Hampshire!” Josh replied excitedly. “We’ve come all the way to find General Lafayette!”

“From New Hampshire to Virginia?” the officer cried in surprise. “What do you want of the general?”

“We’re goin’ to enlist.”

The men looked astonished, and the leader asked sternly :

“Do you mean to say you have come such a distance simply to enlist?”

“That’s the biggest part of our business; but we’ve got a message for the general before we turn soldiers.”

It was evident the explanation was not believed, for at a signal from the officer the troopers pressed more closely to prevent any possibility of escape, and their leader asked sternly :

“If you were so anxious to enlist, why did you not join General Washington’s forces?”

“Because we had to bring a message to General Lafayette.”

“Where is it?” and the officer held out his hand.

“It’s only somethin’ we’re to say to him.”

“Oh, it is, eh? How long since you left Yorktown?”

“Yorktown?” Josh repeated in surprise. “We

haven't been there; that's the place we've been tryin' to keep away from."

"Why?"

"Because Cornwallis is there."

"How do you know?"

"That's what the people have told us."

"It seems to me you gain considerable information of military movements while traveling from New Hampshire. It isn't many days since *we* learned of Cornwallis' whereabouts, and I can't think New Hampshire people know more of what is going on down here than we, who have been following the Britishers so long."

Josh began to realize that he had been unwise in his manner of making explanations, for it was evident the suspicions of the troopers were aroused, and instead of seeing General Lafayette at once he might find it very difficult to bring about an interview.

"We left the headquarters of the Colonial forces on the Hudson River nine days ago," he said seriously, "an' have ridden at our best pace since then in order to repeat certain words to General Lafayette. It can do no harm to let us see him, and a delay now might cause trouble."

"You mean for yourselves. Spies do not care to remain in an enemy's camp any longer than is absolutely necessary."

"But we are not spies!" Ben cried vehemently. "My father is a lieutenant in Colonel Scammell's light infantry."

“Why did you not remain with him?”

Josh motioned for Ned to speak, and the latter said in an earnest, respectful tone :

“There is good reason why you should be suspicious, sir ; but I beg you will report to the general the fact of our being here, and leave it for him to decide whether he will see us or not. Our coming to this place is not strange when the circumstances are known. We started from New Hampshire to join the Colonial forces at Dobb’s Ferry ; but on arriving there were sent at once on a mission to your general.”

“Are you enlisted men ?”

“No, sir ; but we shall enlist at once.”

“And you want me to believe that General Washington would send three boys as messengers, when he could as well have despatched an old soldier ?”

“It don’t make any difference *what* you believe !” Ben cried, losing all control of his temper. “We have told the truth, and only ask that you repeat the story to the general. It is for him to decide why we were sent.”

Josh realized that hasty words would not forward their cause, and attempted to ride to Ben’s side ; but those nearest prevented him.

The three were close prisoners, and it was evident they would not be allowed to hold communication with each other.

The officer spoke a few words to one of the men, and then said sternly :

“You will deliver up your weapons, and consider yourselves prisoners.”

“There couldn’t have been any mistake as to the last, from the moment you first surrounded us,” Ben said hotly, and Josh tried in vain to prevent him, by gestures, from giving way to his anger.

“It doesn’t seem as if there was any necessity for so much severity,” Ned added quietly, as he handed his musket to the nearest man. “One would think, after so long and dangerous a journey, we might be given the benefit of a doubt until you can learn more about us.”

“The fact that you are not already hanged to the nearest tree shows that we *are* giving you the benefit of the doubt,” the officer replied as he rode off a short distance, and three soldiers took charge of the boys.

“It’s a wonder you don’t deprive us of our horses,” Ben cried when the soldier seized his bridle-rein, thus forcing him to follow. “The Continentals have done that for us once already, and you may as well continue the same course.”

“If you had friends in General Washington’s camp, how does it happen you were made prisoners?” the man asked suspiciously, and Ben realized how much harm he was doing by giving way to his ill-temper.

“We were not made prisoners; our horses were taken, that is all,” he added quickly.

“Yes, that is all,” the man said mockingly. “Well, I reckon you need watching, if the troops

to which you say your father belongs took your horses."

"See here, Ben," Josh said sharply, "by telling only a portion of our story you give these men good cause to believe us spies. They may be our accusers, but they can't be our judges, an' the proper course is to wait until we are where everything can be explained."

Ben knew by this time how unwise he had been, and remained silent until they arrived at the camp.

Here the boys were closely guarded by two of the men, while the third disappeared, probably to make a report, and night had covered the earth with darkness when the guards were given orders as to the disposition of the prisoners.

It was not to be expected that an army while on the march would be provided with what would serve as a guardhouse, and the young messengers were taken to the very center of the encampment, where permission to dismount was given.

Two soldiers with muskets loaded and primed stood guard in front of the boys, who had thrown themselves on the ground, weary and disappointed, while hundreds of men passed and repassed as they gazed curiously at the supposed spies.

"Anybody would fancy we were monkeys on exhibition," Ned said bitterly. "I wonder if these men never saw New Hampshire boys before?"

"I reckon all hands in the camp will come between now an' mornin' to see if it is possible to recognize us," Josh replied. "You fellers seem to

think we're in a tight place ; but that's all wrong. General Lafayette ain't such a fool as the officer who captured us, an' he'll give us a chance to tell our story."

"I've made the matter worse by getting angry," Ben said despondently.

"If you were in Cornwallis' camp it might do to act as if your last day had come," Master Higgins replied with a laugh. "I know it's kinder rough to stay here, when we should be havin' the best these fellers have got ; but our turn will come to-morrow, an' then the idiot who arrested us will be glad to beg our pardon."

"It isn't impossible the general may refuse to see us," Ned suggested.

"He might, if he was different from what I take him to be ; but a man what'll come so far jest to help us against the king can't be a fool, so we'll see him in the mornin'."

Then Josh rolled over on his back, with his hands under his head, and before another remark could be made was apparently wrapped in slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

GENERAL LAFAYETTE.

THE young messengers had fancied that the first night spent in the American camp would be a season of great rejoicing, amid which they would stand out brilliantly as heroes, although exactly why this should be neither had any very clear idea.

They were sufficiently prominent, but it was as supposed spies instead of boys who had accomplished some great task by which their country was to be benefited, and were more uncomfortable, both in mind and body, than at any time since leaving Portsmouth.

Spending the night on the hard ground in the open air was not conducive to repose, and before them ever was the knowledge that the guard would readily open fire if they should overstep the bounds set as their prison.

Although Josh had pretended to make light of the situation, and professed to believe there would be a radical change as soon as the morning dawned, his companions understood that he was far from being lighthearted.

He had apparently fallen asleep immediately after lying down, but, ten minutes later, Ben noticed that his eyes were open.

“Thinking of what you will say when General Lafayette gets down on his knees to beg your pardon because his men arrested you as a spy?” Ben asked grimly.

“It wasn’t exactly that; I was tryin’ to make up my mind whether I’d stay here with these fellers, or go back to General Washington’s camp.”

“There must be considerable smooth talking done before you’ll be at liberty to go anywhere. I made such a fool of myself, whining about our horses having been seized at Dobb’s Ferry, that we shall have the hardest kind of work to make the officers here believe anything we say.”

“It can be done, though,” Josh replied confidently. “When a feller is tellin’ the straight truth, he’s bound to make folks understand that he ain’t lyin’.”

“Therefore you feel perfectly content to be on exhibition in this camp as a spy?” Ned asked bitterly.

“Well, I can’t say exactly that. I’d rather have a couple of blankets an’ somethin’ to eat; but so long as I must do without both, there’s considerable satisfaction in knowin’ these fellers will soon feel bad ’cause they treated us in this way.”

“I’d rather they felt now like making us somewhere near comfortable.”

“Look here, boys,” and Josh arose to a sitting posture, “if it would do any good to whine ’bout this thing, I’d join in with you till the camp fairly howled; but so long as it won’t, I go in for makin’

the best of it. Even s'posin' we was to be hanged as spies, how much better off should we be by frettin' an' fumin' over it? Things will come out all right at some time or other, an' if they don't after we've told our story to the general, there's nothin' we can do to straighten 'em."

Then Master Higgins laid down again, and fell asleep, or pretended to do so.

Ben and Ned were quite confident it would be impossible for them to lose consciousness in slumber; but when they stretched out at full length because such positions were a trifle more comfortable than sitting upright, sleep began to overpower them, and finally both were in the land of dreams.

It was daylight, although the sun had not yet risen, when Ben awakened, and Josh was talking in a friendly manner with one of the guards.

"How long have you been up?" Ben asked.

"An hour or so."

"Are we to have breakfast?"

"I reckon there won't be any trouble about gettin' as much to eat as the soldiers themselves have, an' that ought to satisfy us."

"Almost anything would taste good."

"It'll come in time," Josh replied confidently, and then he resumed his conversation with the soldier.

It could readily be seen that Master Higgins had gained the confidence of at least one of the men, for this particular guard no longer scowled upon his prisoners, and even his comrade appeared quite friendly.

Ned was awake before Josh ceased talking with the soldier, and when the conversation had come to an end the former asked in a low tone:

“Have you found out what they are going to do with us?”

“Of course he don’t know as much as that, but he says we’ll most likely have a chance to tell our story to the officer of the day, although all the men believe us to be spies sent by Cornwallis.”

“They are bound to let us see General Lafayette, no matter *who* we are.”

“That doesn’t follow. They might give us a trial, with no chance to tell our story to any except the officers of the court.”

“But Colonel Scammell told us we were to repeat the words to no one but the general himself.”

“An’ we shall obey orders, no matter what is threatened,” Josh said decidedly. “They shan’t frighten me, whatever they do!”

While the boys were talking a soldier brought them corn bread and water, and upon this poor fare they made a most appetizing breakfast, after which all three were disposed to take a less gloomy view of the situation.

An hour later a squad of six men came up, and the boys were escorted to a tent not many yards from where they spent the night.

Here they found four officers, the highest in rank being a colonel, and Josh whispered triumphantly to Ned:

“This ain’t a reg’lar court, that’s certain, for I’ve

heard how they run such things in the army. Now we'll get a chance to tell our story in proper shape."

"You'd better do the talking; we can't trust Ben to keep his temper, and I'm nowhere by the side of you."

"Back me up if I get stuck?"

"Of course."

"What are you whispering about?" the colonel asked sternly. "Cooking up a story?"

"We were tryin' to settle which should do the talkin'," Josh replied promptly.

"Why is there any necessity for that? If the truth is to be told, one can do it as well as another."

"It seems so, don't it?" Josh asked innocently. "Yet when your men first made us prisoners last night we lost our temper, an' what we had to say didn't sound straight, though it was true."

"You confessed you had been made prisoners once before by the colonial forces, and your horses taken from you."

"Yes, sir."

"You pretended to have a message from General Washington."

"No, sir. We never saw General Washington; but we *have* got a message from Colonel Scammell to General Lafayette, and are to repeat it to no one but him."

"When was this message given you?"

"See here, mister; won't you please let me tell the whole story from the time I first met these two

fellers?" and Josh spoke very earnestly now. "It needn't take half as long as for you to ask all these questions, an' you'll understand it better."

The gentlemen appeared greatly amused by Josh's manner of making the request, and the colonel gave him permission to do as he wished.

He began by saying:

"In the first place, these two fellers are way up above me; they've got equipments, an' all that sort of thing, while I haven't. When I first met 'em I'd been hangin' 'round the country doin' whatever jobs I could find that would pay my way, an' gettin' a pretty slim livin' the most of the time."

Then, after going into details regarding his meeting with Ben and Ned, Josh related the story of their travels in a manner which interested his hearers greatly.

He spoke of the encounter with the spies; told several anecdotes not greatly to Sim's credit, and described the recovery of the horses and seizure of the mule at Bennington, in a most comical fashion. He referred to his great desire to enlist; of how his hopes were dashed when they received such a disappointing reception at Dobb's Ferry. He described his joy at finally having an opportunity to purchase a position as a colonial soldier, and related all the incidents of the journey from the Hudson to the Pamunkey River.

Fully half an hour had passed before he finished, and yet his auditors did not appear uneasy, or eager to bring the interview to an end.

“What we’ve got to say to the general don’t seem to ’mount to very much, ’cordin’ to my way of thinkin’; but we promised not to tell it to anybody else, an’ you can see we’re bound to keep our word.”

This was the conclusion of Josh’s story, and the colonel looked at him sharply for an instant, after which he asked :

“Suppose I refuse to believe that you have told, until the message is repeated to me?”

“Then you’d allers have to think I’m a liar, for it can’t be done,” Josh said mournfully, but decidedly.

“If I believe that, you will be tried, and probably condemned as a spy.”

“It’ll be kinder tough on us; but we’ll know we only did what was right.”

“Are you willing to be hanged rather than tell us what Colonel Scammell confided to you?” one of the other officers asked.

“I ain’t *willin’*, of course not; but I’ll be hanged all the same, I s’pose.”

The officers whispered together a short time, and then the colonel said sternly :

“I will believe all you have told, if the message is repeated now; in case you refuse, a trial may be necessary, and death by hanging will probably be the result.”

Ben looked thoroughly frightened; he had fancied the officers believed Josh’s story, and this sudden change surprised quite as much as it alarmed him.

Ned stepped quickly to Josh's side, took him by the hand, and faced their judges.

"Do you think it is better to die than repeat a few words which, it is admitted, have little or no meaning?" the colonel asked sternly.

"Yes, sir," Ned said firmly, and Josh nodded in approval. "You'd let Ben go, of course, because he's got a father an' mother, an' we're willin' to bear all the blame."

"It may be too late to retreat from the bold stand you have taken, after this interview is closed."

"We don't intend to retreat, sir. If it was possible, we'd tell what you want to know; but we promised Colonel Scammell, and of course it can't be done."

"There's one thing certain," Josh added, "we're not spies, an' have never seen the English camp."

"Yet you refuse to do as I command?"

"It's as Ned says, sir, we *can't*, an' that ends it."

"Hold on, Colonel Stewart," one of the officers interrupted. "It is cruel to try the brave lads further. There is no question but that these two," and he pointed to Josh and Ned, "would go to the gallows rather than reveal their secret. I am proud to know they raise such boys in New Hampshire."

Josh was at a loss to understand the full meaning of this remark but he said quickly:

"I'm about the poorest they have up that way, sir; but even *I* know what it means to make a promise."

"I agree with the captain, that you have been

tried sufficiently," Colonel Stewart said as he held out both hands to the boys. "You are braver than a good many men, and your friend need not reproach himself if he did not come out of the ordeal as well; it was a hard test."

"Then you don't believe we are spies?" Josh asked in surprise, just beginning to get an inkling of the true state of affairs.

"Not a bit of it; neither do I want you to reveal that which is to be kept a secret. You showed so much courage I was tempted to learn whether you could be frightened into betraying your trust. It was not from idle curiosity, or to afford amusement, that I did it; but to try your metal for a piece of work we want done very soon. Now you shall see the general, and I guarantee a hearty welcome after he learns of your bravery."

All present cordially greeted and congratulated the boys, not excepting Ben, although even he could see that they were in a certain degree less enthusiastic regarding him than his comrades.

Colonel Stewart gave the young messengers little time to realize their good fortune. Immediately after promising they should see General Lafayette, he left the tent, and returned before the officers had ceased speaking words of praise.

"You are to come with us," he said, with a gesture to his comrades, and the entire party filed out, each of the men showing plainly that the young messengers were friends to be honored, rather than enemies.

It was a sort of triumphal procession, and Josh's happiness was complete when they passed the officer who had arrested them the night previous.

"Say, mister!" he shouted, to the great amusement of those with him, "there are *some* folks who believe three boys can be sent all the way down here on an honest errand."

The officer's cheeks crimsoned, and he turned quickly away; but Josh, who watched him closely, observed that he gazed after the party until they entered a tent with a flag above it, and with two sentries pacing to and fro in front.

"General, I have brought the messengers, as you commanded," the colonel announced as they entered, and for the moment Josh believed he was being trifled with.

A young man, not many years older than the boys from New Hampshire, advanced quickly, extended his hands in the most friendly manner possible, and said with a peculiar accent:

"It is always a pleasure to meet with heroes, and in this country I have found many; but none more brave than you."

Josh looked inquiringly from one to the other, and then critically at the uniform worn by the general. It seemed to him there must be some mistake, and yet it was hardly possible soldiers would play a trick which could have no other purpose than to mislead for the moment three country lads.

"Is it sure enough General Lafayette?" he whispered to Colonel Stewart, and the general overhearing the question, laughed heartily.

“You expected to find an old man?”

“I didn’t count on seein’ a—a——”

“Boy is what you would call me. You may do so, my friend; I freely accord you the same privilege which General Cornwallis assumes. He also thinks and speaks of me as a boy. You have come from the brave General Washington, and have a message for me?”

Ned motioned for Josh to continue to act as spokesman, and the latter said with a slight show of nervousness:

“We haven’t seen General Washington, sir. It was Colonel Scammell who——”

“Is it Colonel Alexander Scammell of whom you speak?”

“Yes, sir; he’s from New Hampshire, an’ Ben’s father is a lieutenant in his regiment.”

“What is the message for which you were willing to deliver up your lives rather than give to any one but myself?”

“Is it all right to say it now?” Josh asked doubtfully, looking significantly at the number present.

“There is no longer anything to fear, my friend. These gentlemen are in my confidence.”

“He told us to tell you about Sim Perkins——”

“That may be related at some future time,” Colonel Stewart interrupted, “or I will tell it to the general at a more convenient season. It is the message which he is eager to hear.”

“We were to say to you, sir,” and Josh drew his comrades to his side that it might appear as if all

three were delivering the words, " 'Clinton will be surprised when he learns the army has gone south.' That's all, sir."

Lafayette's face lighted up suddenly, and then it was as if he checked himself, for he added quietly :

"Repeat that once more, my friend, to avoid a mistake."

"I'm certain it is right, sir, even though it don't seem to 'mount to much for a fact. 'Clinton will be surprised when he learns the army has gone south.'"

The young messengers had previously been astonished by the varying incidents of the day; now they were bewildered by the sudden change which came over the occupants of the tent.

It was as if General Lafayette had suddenly taken leave of his senses; he alternately embraced the officers and danced from very joy, while every man seemed to think it necessary to congratulate his neighbor. During five minutes these soldiers behaved very much like boys in a frolic, and then the general asked Josh :

"Can you tell me when the army will leave?"

"Leave where, sir?"

"When do they begin the journey? How long must we wait before they come?"

Josh was about to protest that he did not even understand the question, when, like a flash, came to his mind the meaning of the message they had brought so far.

"We were not told anything, sir. We left the

camp a few hours after arriving; but some of the soldiers said a very important move was about to be made, and strict watch was kept over every one who passed by on the road."

"The change of base is to be made at once!" the general cried in an ecstasy as he embraced Colonel Stewart vigorously. "That which we have prayed for is about to be accomplished. The movement must have been near at hand, otherwise the men would not have observed the preparations. At last the 'boy' can face my lord Cornwallis! Would that we had better information of his defenses!"

"It appears to me that we now have an excellent opportunity of gaining that which you wish, sir," and Colonel Stewart glanced meaningly at the boys.

"It seems cruel to send them into such danger after what they have already endured," the general replied thoughtfully.

"A brave man only asks as his reward another post of danger, and these may be boys in years, but they are men in point of courage."

"You are correct, my dear colonel. Attend to the matter, and if it is done they shall be rewarded with something more than empty praise. For the present I confide them to you. Messengers who bring such good news should be treated royally."

"They shall have whatever their fancies dictate, sir."

"I shall see you again, my friends," the general said to the New Hampshire boys, once more press-

ing their hands. "You have made me happy, very happy, and Colonel Stewart will attend to your comfort while you remain with us."

"I hope there's no show of your sendin' us away, sir," Josh cried in alarm. "We have been promised a chance to enlist, an' when Colonel Scammell comes he's goin' to see that I have what equipment is needed; the other fellers are well fixed that way."

"I shall be the one to provide your equipment, my brave lad, and had I the power, you would leave this tent with the badge of knighthood."

Then, waving them an adieu which was not only courteous but friendly, the general began conversing eagerly with his staff, while Colonel Stewart escorted the boys out of the tent.

"That makes the second feller what has promised me an equipment, an' I ain't a soldier yet," Josh whispered in Ned's ear when they were in the open air. "At this rate I'll be gray-headed before I get into a uniform."

Colonel Stewart led the young messengers to his tent, and calling his body servant, an old negro, said:

"These young gentlemen are my friends and guests. I fancy a generous breakfast will not come amiss to them, and if there is anything they want that can be procured, get it at once." To the boys he added: "You are free to go where you please, and I will see to it that the men know how great a service you have rendered. The horses and arms which were taken from you will be returned at any

time you wish them. The general commanded me to attend to your comfort, and I hope you will make known your desires. Now I would like to leave you awhile; the news you brought will be discussed at headquarters, and I am eager to be there."

"It is not necessary you should stay with us, sir," Ned replied. "We can do full justice to another breakfast, and then we would like to walk around the camp."

"Go where you wish and I will see you after your curiosity has been gratified."

Then the colonel took his departure, and the servant began bustling around to make his master's guests as comfortable as possible, until Josh, who was rendered uneasy by so much attention, said:

"See here, we don't want anythin' but breakfast, an' we ain't countin' on makin' trouble for you. Jest let us lay 'round a spell as we like."

"What is you gwine fur to eat, sah?"

"It don't make much difference, except that we've been livin' on corn cake for quite a spell, an' there's no need of bringin' any great lot of that, unless you're short of other stuff."

CHAPTER X.

HONORED GUESTS.

THE boys had no reason to complain of lack of attention from the moment they left Colonel Stewart's tent after the first interview.

In order to cheer the disheartened men, the general caused it to be announced that the main body of the Continental army was marching south to crush Cornwallis, and no news could have been more cheering to soldiers who had been alternately pursuing and retreating before an enemy which they thought they ought not attack because of disparity in numbers.

As a matter of course, instantly the announcement was made every one knew who had brought the glad tidings, and the boys were the heroes of the hour.

Colonel Stewart's servant not only considered it his duty to serve for this first breakfast everything eatable in his master's larder, but borrowed from others until the meal was a veritable feast.

"It makes a good deal of difference in this camp whether a feller is a spy or a messenger from General Washington," Josh said laughingly, as he tried in vain to eat all that was set before him.

“Two hours ago corn bread was good enough for us, an’ now we’ve got more in one meal than I ever saw put out for a single breakfast.”

“You and Ned don’t really need anything to eat,” Ben said with a sigh.

“Why not?” Josh asked in surprise. “Don’t you s’pose we’re as hungry as you?”

“That may be, but after all the praise you’ve had, it don’t seem as if you could think of anything as common as food.”

“What has been said about one, goes for all.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Ben replied emphatically. “When they began to threaten that we should be hanged, I lost courage, and acted like a coward. From that minute you two were the ones to whom all the credit belonged.”

“That is nonsense,” Ned said sharply. “Was there any difference in the way we were received by General Lafayette?”

“Perhaps not; but that was because he hadn’t seen me when the threats were made. I understood it all when you were being congratulated in this tent.”

“Now don’t be foolish, Ben,” and Ned threw his arm around the boy’s neck. “It was Josh who covered himself with glory, and I came out of the interview no better than you.”

“Didn’t you back up what he said, while I stood by like an idiot, with not a word to say?”

Both his companions understood exactly how Ben felt, and during at least half an hour they did their

best to make him believe he was as high in the estimation of the officers as any member of the party.

They failed to succeed entirely in their efforts, but had the satisfaction of knowing he was cheered decidedly by the arguments used.

Ned insisted that Josh was the only one who stood out particularly great on the occasion, while Master Higgins claimed that the credit was given to all alike, since he had acted simply as spokesman.

"It was only my luck that you fellers let me do the talkin'," he said impatiently. "What *one* said *all* meant, an' I'm certain the officers see it that way. Instead of settin' here moonin' over such foolishness, I allow we'd better go out an' look the camp over. We didn't have a chance at Dobbs Ferry, an' ought to make the most of our time now."

Since breakfast had been eaten there was nothing to keep the boys in the tent, and they strolled leisurely out, all unsuspecting of the reception which was in store for them.

An hundred or more men had gathered in front of Colonel Stewart's quarters, and instantly the young messengers made their appearance a deafening shout was heard.

"Three cheers for the New Hampshire boys!" some one cried, and these were given with a will, the recipients of the honor standing silent and motionless, with reddening cheeks, until the tumult had subsided.

Josh looked positively distressed, and was about to beat a hasty retreat, but found his progress barred by the crowd.

“After what you lads have done, I don’t reckon you can afford to show the white feather now you’re among friends,” one of the men shouted laughingly. “You didn’t act so scared when you stood a good chance of being hung as spies.”

This remark was greeted with another volley of cheers, which brought to the scene all the idle men in camp, and half a dozen voices were heard high above the others insisting that the young messengers tell the story of their long journey.

Colonel Stewart, who had come out of the general’s tent to learn the cause of the tumult, said laughingly to Ned:

“There is nothing for it but to satisfy them, my boy. You must repeat the story, and will be fortunate if you are not called upon to do the same thing many times to day. You are now under no pledge of secrecy, and everything may be told. The poor fellows, after so many hardships and deprivations, are entitled to hear the good news.”

Then the colonel contrived to make his way back through the throng after some difficulty, and, the demands for the story increasing in vehemence, Ned said to Josh:

“You’ll have to go ahead.”

“It’s your turn now; I’ve said enough. If the spokesman is to get all the credit, one of you fellers must give the yarn.”

There was no necessity for any controversy over the matter, because the soldiers settled the details to suit themselves.

It would not be possible for all to hear a single speaker, so great were the numbers, and as if by common consent they divided into three parties, each section taking possession of one of the messengers.

It was noon before the boys were at liberty to follow their own inclinations, and then Josh beckoned his comrades to his side.

Obedying, they found Master Higgins seated near an old man on whose cheek was the scar of a newly healed sword-cut.

"Here's a specimen of Tarleton's work," Josh said as he pointed to the wound. "It strikes me we've been yarnin' our full share, an' now I propose the sergeant tell us what General Lafayette has been doin' down here while we was growin' old enough to come into the army."

"That's the idea," Ned cried enthusiastically as he and Ben seated themselves by the soldier's side, and the remainder of the curious ones, having learned all the boys could tell them and not particularly interested in a recital of their own actions, sauntered away to discuss the new phase of affairs.

"I ain't any great of a story-teller," the sergeant began, "an' besides, it's been about the same thing over an' over ag'in all summer. We didn't dare do much fightin', for the Britishers outnumbered us three or four to one, but the 'boy' hung mighty close to Cornwallis' heels all the time."

“Tell us jest what you’ve been doin’?” Josh said eagerly.

“Well,” the old sergeant replied, with a slight show of hesitation, during which time he carefully filled a short, black pipe, “I’ll begin with the day I jined General Lafayette’s forces, when he marched into Baltimore, an’ borrowed two thousand pounds from the folks there to buy outfits for his men. He hadn’t done anything very great then, an’ the troops were gettin’ well-nigh discouraged. A good many were desertin’, an’ it begun to look as if this part of the army would be broke up.”

“When was this?” Ben asked.

“About the first of April. I was in a regiment from Massachusetts, what was sent out this way to fill up the gaps. The Baltimore folks treated us in great shape; the women gave a big ball for the general, an’ then turned to an’ made us men shirts and blouses; but all that didn’t soothe them as was pinin’ to get out of the trouble.

“Before we left there the general hanged one man who was caught after havin’ deserted, an’ drummed another out of camp. Then he turned to an’ offered to let every mother’s son go home who applied to headquarters for a pass. That kinder knocked the cowardice outter the boys, an’ from that time till now we hain’t had any trouble in the way of desertions.

“It was the 19th of April when we left Baltimore, makin’ a forced march through Alexandria, Fredericksburg and Bowling Green to Richmond, where

we arrived ten hours ahead of the Britishers. There we stayed, not more than a thousand men ag'in four times that number, till May 27th, when Richmond was evacuated, an' on the next day we was at Winston's Bridge. From there we made good time, the Britishers close behind us, to Dandridge's, where Goldmine Creek jines the South Anna.

"On the 30th we started north, crossin' the North Anna, an' by June 2d struck Mattapony Church, an' on the 4th crossed the Rapidan twenty miles above Fredericksburg, where we waited till General Wayne came up with his brigade, about the 10th of June. After that we moved right lively, as you shall see.

"The first march took us to Boswell's Tavern, an' on the next day we struck through the woods, repairin' the road as we went, until arrivin' near Allegree's, thirteen miles east of Charlottesville. About the 15th Cornwallis, who hadn't done the mischief he counted on, faced toward Richmond, an' we followed close behind. On the 17th we were at Dandridge's again. Two days later General Steuben with four hundred an' fifty men jined us, an' when Cornwallis started for the coast once more, we kept at his heels. On the 23d we made up our minds the Britishers were goin' to give us battle, an' pretty nigh the whole army stood ready for action five or six hours. On the 24th we struck Bottom's Bridge an' camped at New Kent Court House next day.

"On the 26th we had a little skirmish six miles above Williamsburg, an' it is said each side lost

about thirty, though I count as how the Britishers suffered more'n we did. Then we dodged back an' forth, five miles this day, an' ten next, till what with the heat an' the continual marchin', I was mighty nigh done up.

"On the 6th of July came the battle of Green Spring, an' it seemed good to have a little fightin' after so much runnin' 'round. It'll have to be said we was licked, but it wasn't sich a terrible thrashin' that Cornwallis could afford to crow very much, while it perked our boys up amazin'.

"We reached Malvern Hill on the 16th, an' laid there till the 31st. Then into Richmond ag'in, from there to Meadow Bridge, an' on the 4th of this month started down the Pamunkey River, to here, where I reckon we're likely to stay till we go for Cornwallis in good earnest. It's been what you might call a pretty tough campaign, with too much wear an' tear on the legs, an' not enough blood spilled to keep the men in good humor."

"Do you believe Cornwallis will be whipped when General Washington gets here?" Josh asked.

"Well, lad, that's a question it ain't so easy to answer. Old Corney ain't any fool of a soldier, let me tell you, an' there'll have to be some precious hard work afore he cries quits. When we know what he's done at Yorktown, an' why he's stoppin' in that place, it will be easier to say what'll happen when the Continentals go at him tooth an' nail, as I allow will be done now, 'cordin' to the message you brought. I s'pose you boys are countin' on shoulderin' a musket?"

“That we are,” Ned replied emphatically. “We expected to enlist at Dobb’s Ferry; but were sent here. It has been promised that we shall be soldiers as soon as the main army arrives.”

“I reckon you won’t have to wait that long. General Lafayette is bound to favor you on account of what has been done, an’ when all you ask is to be allowed to wear a uniform, at a time when he needs men, it don’t seem as if there’d be any great amount of fuss made in fixin’ the thing up to suit.”

“If I could have my way, I’d be a soldier before night,” Josh said.

“An’ I’d like to put you three through your paces. I allow all hands would make crackin’ good troopers, pervidin’ you were trained right.”

“And you claim to know just about how it should be done?” Ned asked with a laugh.

“I oughter,” the old man replied gravely. “I’ve stuck to the Continental army nigh on to six years now; seen the times when a raw potato was high livin’, an’ been month after month with never so much as a look at money. Sometimes with a uniform an’ shoes, an’ then ag’in without a great deal of either. There’s been a good many ups an’ downs, but if it please God that I don’t get my final billet too soon, I’ll be in at the death, which I reckon is bound to come in these parts before many months.”

“I’d like to——”

Josh did not finish the remark, for at that instant Colonel Stewart’s servant approached, and said in a

tone as respectful as if he was speaking to his master :

“ De kurnel wishes fur to say dat he’s in de tent, an’ would be pow’rfully obligated ef de young gentlemen war to cum dar fur er while.”

“ Now you’re goin’ to hear ’bout a chance to ’list, I reckon,” the old veteran said as he put his pipe carefully in his pocket. “ If I’m kerrect, come to me when you want any p’int on solderin’.”

“ That’s what we will do,” Josh cried as he hastened away with his comrades, “ an’ I hope you’ve guessed it right.”

Judging from the expression on Colonel Stewart’s face when the boys entered his tent, he had no very good news to impart. He was grave almost to sternness, and appeared mournful.

“ Have you been enjoying yourselves?” he asked.

“ Yes, sir,” Ned replied. “ We’ve been all over the camp, and had the good fortune to find an old soldier who was willing to explain what the Continental forces have been doing in this section of the country.”

“ Then you must have heard a story of privation, hardships and fatiguing marches, with very little glory.”

“ That is to come, sir, if what he predicts proves true,” Ben said quickly.

“ I would like to hear what fortune he gives us.”

“ He was careful not to speak with too great certainty ; but says he ‘ is bound to be in at the death,’

which he believes will happen in these parts before many months."

"A modest fortune-teller! He neglects to say which side the coming engagement will prove death to; the true Continental soldier should be positive his enemy is to be conquered when next met, no matter how strong the opposing force may be. There is very much to be done, however, before we shall be ready for an engagement, and the most important of the work should be performed before General Washington's forces arrive."

The boys could not reply to this remark, and for the good reason that they hardly understood it.

Colonel Stewart remained silent a few seconds, and then said slowly, as if thinking aloud:

"It is in the highest degree necessary that we have definite and reliable information from Yorktown at once."

"Will it be hard to get, sir?" Josh asked.

"That is yet to be proven. Spies must be sent there, and who can say whether they will return? Our greatest difficulty at this moment is the lack of men to send. We have been hobnobbing, as it were, with the English forces so long that the soldiers are almost acquainted with each other. Strangers in this part of the country would serve our purpose better."

This was said in such a meaning tone that the boys could not fail to understand the purpose of the interview. They gazed at each other an instant and Ned motioned for Ben to speak, thus giving

him an opportunity to atone for his lack of spirit during the morning.

“We are ready to do whatever you wish of us,” Ben said with a slight show of hesitation. “Perhaps you think I didn’t come out of the trial very well when you threatened to have us hanged; but it wasn’t because I was too much frightened to speak—I was sort of bewildered.”

“As well you might be, my lad, and I have no question as to your courage. What has already been accomplished proves that. I am willing to admit I hoped you would volunteer for this service. It has been talked of at headquarters, and all agree you might perform the work better than any one we could send from the army. I want you to understand thoroughly the danger to which you must be exposed. There is but one fate for a spy, and the English will have no hesitancy in dealing that out if you are discovered; it is only what we should do if we caught their men inside our lines.”

“We surely ought to have some knowledge of the danger,” Ned replied with a smile. “It is not yet twenty-four hours since we were positively assured we should be hanged, and if the officer who arrested us had had the management of affairs, I believe we would have been strung up at once.”

“There is decidedly more danger now than then,” the colonel said musingly. “On this occasion you will indeed be spies, and merit an ignominious death if captured.”

“We are willing to go, sir, if by so doing we can be of service to our country.”

“You will be performing a more important duty than when you came here; and in case of success you shall be liberally rewarded.”

“You don’t mean in the way of money?” Ned cried quickly.

“It is far from my purpose to insult you by an offer of that kind. You will become soldiers, and promotion will follow as soon as you have sufficient military knowledge to be entrusted with a commission; that I promise on my word of honor.”

“It will be enough if we are allowed to enlist,” Josh cried gleefully, “only I’d like it understood that we shall start in as soon as we get back.”

“Whenever you please after the task has been accomplished.”

“Then it’s settled without need of any more talk; when do you want us to go?”

“Within twenty-four hours. I will see that all the arrangements are made, and you shall be informed as soon as a plan of action has been mapped out.”

Josh looked like one who had been promised some great favor; but Ben and Ned were more serious. They understood that this mission was considerably different from the first, although there was no thought in the mind of either that it would be preferable to remain in camp.

“I shall tell the general you did not wait to be asked to go, but volunteered your services, and I can assure you in advance of his gratitude. In the meanwhile you are at liberty, as before, to occupy

your time in any way most agreeable. I expect you will take supper here, of course."

With this remark Colonel Stewart left the tent, and the boys had their first opportunity for a private conversation since the examination of the morning began.

"We're gettin' a good many promises about enlistin'; but the further we go the more there is to do, an' it begins to look as though the Britishers might be driven off before we have the right to wear a uniform," Josh said when they were alone. "If we go to Yorktown on this business, we can't say much to Sim Perkins 'bout bein' a spy, eh?"

"If I thought our duties had anything in common with his, I'd let every man in this camp call me a coward before I'd stir a step; but it is different. He's a spy in order that he may work injury to his country, while we do it to aid her."

"You're right, Ned. I didn't say that about Sim with any idea we'd get to be as mean as he is, but only for fun. We'll have something to tell the folks at home after this is over, I reckon."

"If we ever get back."

"Ever get back? Well, I'm countin' on goin' when the rest of the folks do."

"I mean if we ever come back from Yorktown. You know what will happen if we're caught."

"I don't count on lettin' the Britishers know who I am. If a feller keeps his wits about him, he oughter be able to go in an' out of the town a good many times without runnin' much risk."

“I don’t think there’s any necessity of talking about that part of the work,” Ben said nervously.

“We’re to go, and that is the end of it, for awhile at least.”

“Do you feel like backin’ out?” Josh asked with a suspicious look at his companion.

“I wouldn’t if I knew we’d be captured within five minutes after we reached the town. Somehow I can’t talk over such things as you and Ned do; I kinder get fidgety, and then folks believe I’m afraid.”

“We’ll find something different to think of; let’s go an’ see if the hosses are all right. That mule will think I’ve forgotten him entirely.”

The others were quite willing to act upon this suggestion of Josh’s, and all three went out, to return an hour later, when they found Colonel Stewart busily engaged in writing.

“The general commanded me to express not only his gratitude, but his admiration of your patriotism in volunteering for the dangerous service. He promises that your desires shall be gratified to the utmost after your return.”

“When are we to start?”

“At midnight.”

CHAPTER XI.

DOWN THE RIVER.

THE boys had expected they would be called upon to do the work for which they had volunteered, within a short time, but did not anticipate being obliged to leave camp immediately.

The past twenty-four hours had been so thoroughly filled with, to them, exciting incidents that they had hardly time for necessary repose.

It was decidedly a hardship to start upon the enterprise so soon, and yet neither of them thought of murmuring.

When Colonel Stewart announced the time for them to leave camp, Josh asked promptly :

“Are we to go on foot, or shall we use our hosses, sir?”

“Neither; it has been decided that your best course will be to take a boat from here, make your way to Gloucester, or some point a short distance above there where you can land, and afterward cross to the English camp. You Portsmouth boys should understand how to handle ’most any kind of a craft.”

“There will be no trouble about that, sir.

Providing the boat isn't too big, we'll guarantee to get her there."

"It will be necessary to spend some little time fishing before you arrive."

"Why?" Josh asked in astonishment.

"You must have an excuse for entering the English camp, and the most plausible one will be that you have come to sell fish. You may be questioned as to where you reside, and that, I conceive, is the greatest difficulty you will have to encounter, since you are unacquainted with this section of the country. It has been suggested that you claim a residence on the York River, and I can devise no better story. If it pleases you to do so, note well some dwelling on the shore, so you can describe it as your home."

"What are we to do after we get to Yorktown, sir?" Ned asked as Colonel Stewart paused.

"Observe well everything in and around the camp, particularly the defenses which have been thrown up. Any information will be valuable."

"When do you expect us to return?"

"Not until you have made yourselves familiar with the place, unless it should be that you are prevented from landing, which I hardly think probable. If inquiries are made relative to the American forces, in this section, tell without hesitation the location of our camp. In case it seems desirable, you may say that you have visited it for the purpose of selling fish, and answer freely all questions, for there is nothing in our position here which it can

benefit the English officers to know. I do not intend to hamper you with instructions. You understand in a general way what is to be done, and it may be better for you to pursue your own devices in the matter."

"Will the boat soon be ready?" Josh asked, eager to set out on the dangerous mission.

"You will find her at the bank of the river, with an outfit for fishing, and as much in the way of provisions as should satisfy your hunger during the next twenty-four hours. It is not well that you should have with you any considerable amount of money, since your purpose cannot be forwarded by such means. Remember you are simply three boys endeavoring to earn an honest livelihood by selling fish, and with no care to which army you dispose of your wares, providing you are paid therefor."

"Shall we carry our guns, sir?"

"By no means. Cunning, not force, must be the only weapon. Now I suggest that you get a few hours of sleep, and will see that you are awakened at the time set for departure. One moment," he added as Josh was about to throw himself on the ground with his customary promptitude when making preparations for the night, "you should have nothing about you which could give a clue to your identity. Better leave all personal belongings here, even to coats and shoes. I have had oil-skin and boots put in the boat, which will be more in accordance with your profession or calling."

Since Colonel Stewart appeared to think no further instructions necessary, Josh laid down upon the ground with a saddle for a pillow, as if his only care in life just at that moment was to indulge in slumber.

The other boys followed his example, but could not as readily summon sleep to their eyelids.

Each felt a certain repugnance to the new duties demanded of them, and, as was only natural, could not banish the gloomy forebodings which filled their minds on the eve of the dangerous mission.

That which had previously been done, and while in the doing seemed so dangerous, was but as child's play compared with this visit to the English camp, where death would certainly follow discovery. There could be no opportunity for defense once they were made prisoners, and the slightest mistake in word or gesture might, and probably would, prove their undoing.

Despite the gravity of the situation, however, the boys did fall asleep after a time, and Colonel Stewart paced to and fro just outside the tent, as if the fact that he was possibly sending these young patriots to death weighed heavily upon him.

The old negro set about preparing a generous meal as the time fixed for the spies' departure drew near, and half an hour before midnight said to his master :

“I'se all ready wid my part, sah, an' ef dem boys am gwine to leab at twelve o'clock, it's time dey was roused up.”

Colonel Stewart entered the tent, leaned over Josh an instant, as if it was a disagreeable task to awaken him, and then laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

Master Higgins was on his feet in an instant.

"I reckon I had a pretty good nap after all," he said with a yawn. "Our quarters were not so comfortable last night that we cared to lay in bed very long this mornin', an' I was kinder short on my allowance of sleep. Is it time for us to be off?"

"It will be when you have eaten something, and walked to the river."

Josh aroused his comrades, and the three did full justice to the repast which had been prepared.

"Now if you are ready, I'll show you the boat," Colonel Stewart said, and Josh replied:

"It seems kinder tough to haul you outer camp at this time in the night."

"I should at least be willing to escort those who are venturing into serious danger at my suggestion."

"Don't look at it that way, sir," Ned said quickly. "Some one would have to go, and it's no worse for us than for anybody else."

"You are brave lads, and when you return it shall be my urgent duty to see that you are rewarded in such a way as you may desire."

Then the colonel went out from the tent, the boys following, and, after a silent walk of fifteen minutes, they arrived at the bank of the river, where was a small boat hauled up in charge of two soldiers.

Colonel Stewart inspected the contents of the craft, and apparently finding everything as he had commanded, said to his companions :

“Here are the fishermen’s outfits, and you had better make an exchange of clothing now.”

This was soon done, the boat was launched, the boys took their stations, Josh and Ned at the oars and Ben steering, and the former said cheerily :

“You can shove off now. Good-night, Colonel Stewart; we’ll see you ag’in within a week.”

“God grant you may,” was the fervent reply, and then the little craft was rowed swiftly out into the river.

The voyage of the spies had begun, and whether it would end in death, or have a successful termination so far as its purpose was concerned, was something no man could predict.

The chances for failure outweighed those of success.

“Well, it seems as if we’d been kinder turned loose, don’t it?” Josh said after the camp was lost to view in the distance. “I s’pose we shall get through all right; but I’d a good deal rather have daylight for it.”

Neither Ben nor Ned felt much in the mood for conversation, and Josh’s remark passed apparently unheeded.

“Keep well out in the stream,” Ned said once to Ben. “I don’t know as it would do any particular harm if we ran aground; but at the same time there’s no need of doing so if it can be avoided.”

Two or three times Josh attempted to enter into conversation, but his companions positively refused to talk, and after awhile he gave way to melody in the shape of vigorous whistling, until Ben said nervously :

“Why not keep still, Josh? There isn’t any sense in making such a noise, and one doesn’t know how near enemies may be.”

“That’s jest what you’ve got to get out of your head, Ben.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, the idea of enemies. If we’re fellers what live down here, an’ are tryin’ to make money fishin’, we can’t have enemies so far as soldiers go.”

“Yes, that’s the way we must play when we’re in the camp ; but there’s no use beginning the game quite so soon,” Ben replied petulantly.

“Why not? The sooner we start in the more used we’ll be to carryin’ it out. I allow the best thing for us is to try to believe we’re exactly what we’re goin’ to claim to be.”

“It might be as well to wait until we decide where we live,” Ned said grimly.

“How will it do to take the first house we see on the left-hand side?”

“I suppose one is as good as another.”

“Then you won’t have to wait very long before getting acquainted with your new home,” Ben said as he pointed toward the shore. “There’s a building, and we must be two or three miles from the American camp by this time.”

Ned turned as if to ascertain whether this residence would suit their purpose or not, when Josh said:

“Pull ashore. We decided to adopt the first one, an’ now there’s no choice in the matter.”

Ned resumed his work with the oar, and in a few moments the boys were so near the shore that it was possible to see the building quite plainly despite the gloom of night.

It was a small, rude structure, hardly more than a hut, and the faint light which could be seen through the crevices of one of the shuttered windows told that it had occupants.

“I’d like to know who lives there?” Josh said half to himself, and Ben asked in surprise:

“What good could that do you?”

“Well, you see, we’d be able to tell a straighter story if we was questioned. Who knows but that some of the English have been around this way, an’ may remember all about the place?”

“I reckon we’ll have to take our chances of that,” Ned said. “If we can describe the outside of the house it will be enough for ordinary purposes.”

“But it would be better if we had the thing down fine,” Josh persisted. “S’pose you fellers let me land, an’ I’ll snoop ’round a bit.”

“What’s the use of wasting so much time?” Ben asked irritably. “I want to get this job over as quickly as possible, and don’t like the idea of fooling about on the river when there’s no need of it.”

“We may finish it sooner by goin’ a little slow

at first," Master Higgins replied sagely. "It would be a pretty good investment to spend an hour here, if we should happen to get cornered in our story."

"It can't do any harm to gain all the information possible," Ned said decidedly. "We'll land you; but don't stay longer than is necessary."

The boat was pulled in to the shore. Josh ran up to the house, knocked vigorously at the door, and despite the lateness of the hour his summons was answered immediately.

He was too far away for the boys to overhear the conversation; but they saw that it was a woman who came to the door, and a few moments later Josh entered the dwelling with the air of an old acquaintance.

A quarter of an hour passed before he reappeared, and then he said as he pushed the skiff from the shore:

"It's all right, boys; I reckon the Britishers can't corner us very bad now.

"Who lives there?" Ned asked.

"An old woman, an' her daughter who's sick. Their names are Martin. The English haven't been 'round the house, although scoutin' parties have come within sight of it two or three times. We shall be safe in claimin' to belong there."

"What excuse did you make for stopping?"

"I told her we'd come from up river, an' was goin' to see if we could sell some fish to the camp. She thought I landed to find out how near the Britishers were."

Then Josh described the interior of the dwelling ; told what he had seen around it, and impressed upon the minds of his comrades that all these details must be remembered, since they might stand them in good stead at some future time.

After this the boys rowed until sunrise, when they breakfasted from the provisions which Colonel Stewart's servant had prepared.

During this entire day they pulled steadily on, and not until late at night were they sufficiently near Yorktown to deem it prudent to begin their work of fishing.

Several times one or the other had landed to make inquiries from those living near the water's edge, and Josh took good care, during the afternoon, to ascertain the best places for fishing within a few miles of the British camp.

The stock of food supplied by Colonel Stewart was exhausted, but they had purchased a small quantity of corn bread, upon which it would be necessary to subsist until their dangerous duty was fully begun.

By sunrise next morning they commenced their labors as fishermen, and before nine o'clock had quite as large a load as was considered necessary for the purpose.

"Now, we're in for it," Josh said as he pulled up the rock which served as an anchor, and seated himself at the oars. "There's to be no more stoppin' till we're where we can't back out."

Ned was silent, Ben decidedly nervous, and Josh

the only member of the party who appeared to be enjoying himself.

“If you fellers look so glum, the Britishers will want to know the reason why,” he said laughingly. “Perk up a bit, an’ don’t be afraid of starin’ at everything, for if we did *really* live up the river, we’d want to get a sight of all that was goin’.”

“Are we to land and go directly into camp?” Ned asked.

“One must stay by the boat, an’ perhaps Ben had better do that part of the work till he feels a little more certain of himself. Give her a sheer in toward the bank, an’ we’ll stop here. I don’t care ’bout gettin’ any nearer that vessel than can be helped,” and Josh motioned toward the frigate *Charon*, which was lying at anchor off the town.

Ben obeyed, and the little craft was swung into a tiny cove a few yards north of a rude dock.

Not until they were close to the shore did either of the boys observe a sentinel patrolling the beach, who had halted as they came in view.

Ben jammed the tiller hard down, as if to beat a retreat, but Josh said in a low tone:

“It’s too late to back out now, an’ we may as well make our first trial here as anywhere else.”

Ned, understanding that it would not be well to allow the soldier to think they were afraid of him, pulled the bow of the craft around, and as it grated on the sand Josh jumped ashore.

“What are you doing here?” the man asked gruffly, approaching the boat for the purpose of ascertaining if she was loaded.

“We ain’t had time for much of anything yet; but count on sellin’ you folks some fish,” Josh replied in a cheery tone. “Don’t you want a nice mess?”

“I’ll take one as a gift,” the man said as he inspected the cargo.

“All right, I reckon we can spare that many,” and Josh lifted a fish from the boat. “Now I s’pose you can tell me where the best chance will be found to sell the balance?”

“Why don’t you go into the town?”

“Because we can get the best prices from the soldiers. That was the way we found it at the other camp.”

“What one do you mean?”

“Up the river a good bit, near where we live.”

“Do you mean the Americans?”

“Of course,” Josh replied, as if surprised such a question should have been asked.

“When was you there?”

“Three days ago.”

The man stood as if deliberating a few seconds, and then said in a friendly tone:

“If you’ve been in the enemy’s camp I fancy the officer of the day will want to see you.”

“I’ll be ’round after we sell the fish,” and Josh began the work of unloading.

“You needn’t do that, for he must have a talk with you first. Come with me, and I’ll see that you’re not kept very long.”

Ben looked distressed, for this savored of deten-

tion, which might end in suspicion, while Ned was far from appearing at ease.

One glance at his companions, and Josh realized that they were not in a proper frame of mind to bear a very severe examination.

"Say!" he cried, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him. "It'll never pay to leave these fish here with nobody to look out for 'em. Why ain't it jest as well to do our dickerin' first, an' the talkin' afterward?"

"You'll be obliged to get permission to visit the camp, and both errands can be done at once by going with me," and the soldier laid his hand on Josh's shoulder, carrying his fish and musket in the other, much to the detriment of the weapon.

"Then let the other fellers stay by the boat. They may find some customers, an' it never'll do to leave things to take care of themselves."

The man hesitated an instant 'as if undecided as to his proper course, and Josh said imploringly:

"Now don't be piggish, after we've given you one of the best fish we had. I can do enough talkin' for all three, if that's what you want."

"Come on then, and step out lively."

"Keep your eyes skinned, or the soldiers will steal your load," Josh shouted to his comrades. "Don't sell 'em less'n fourpence apiece, an' get silver at that. We don't want any more paper stuff than we're obliged to take."

"You don't talk like a very good patriot," the soldier said with a grin.

“But I am, just the same. I reckon a feller can like silver even if he does live in this country.”

“You won’t have a great deal if you defy the king much longer.”

“I ain’t afraid but that King George will take care of them as is kickin’ up all the trouble, though I hadn’t ought to complain ’bout it, seein’s it gives us a prime market for fish.”

This much of the conversation Ned and Ben heard, and then the words could no longer be distinguished, as the two, walking together like old friends, passed on up the shore.

“It’s mighty lucky I ain’t the one the soldier lugged off,” Ben said with a long-drawn sigh of relief. “I’m so shaky it wouldn’t be five minutes before I’d betray the whole business.”

“Josh is the right one for the job, but I hope they won’t keep him a great while. I shan’t breathe free till he’s back.”

Just then a small party of soldiers came lounging along, and Ned found it necessary to act the same part Josh was playing so well.

He demanded fourpence each for the fish; made a good deal of talk about wanting silver for his goods, and, despite the fears he had had regarding his ability to pass as a fisherman, succeeded so well that no suspicions were aroused.

He sold four fish, and the soldiers assured him the entire lot would be readily disposed of as soon as it was generally known in camp that such food could be procured so near at hand.

An hour passed, and Josh had not returned.

Half the cargo was sold, and there was every indication the young spies would soon be forced to set out for another load in order to provide themselves with an excuse for remaining in the vicinity.

At the end of the second hour both the boys were thoroughly alarmed for the safety of Josh.

Sixty minutes more passed, and it seemed certain his true character must have been discovered.

“What shall we do?” Ben asked in distress. “If he’s been made prisoner, it won’t be long before they’ll come after us.”

“We can’t do anything but wait. We’re bound to share his fate, even though it might be possible to escape by running away now.”

The approach of more customers put an end to the conversation, and Ben did his share in serving them, although he was almost wild with apprehension.

CHAPTER XII.

JOSH IN CAMP.

WHILE Ben and Ned were so anxious regarding their friend, fearing lest it had been discovered he was a spy, Master Higgins was rapidly and thoroughly performing the task which had been set for him.

The officer of the day was not ready to examine the alleged fisherman when the sentinel first called his attention to the newcomer, and during nearly half an hour Josh remained where it was possible to gain a good view of the fortifications immediately surrounding the town.

He was careful, however, not to let it appear as if he was idle willingly, but complained bitterly of being forced to loiter in that place while he should be attending to his business.

The soldier, who felt particularly friendly toward the boy because of the present received, did his best to amuse him by pointing out the different objects of interest.

Having been temporarily relieved from duty in order that he might guard the stranger until the officer of the day was ready to interview him, the man paced to and fro with Josh, oftentimes being

led by the boy a longer distance from the quarters than he realized.

Thus it was that Master Higgins had a better opportunity of observing the preparations for defense than would otherwise have been possible.

"It looks like as if you'd been turnin' up a good bit of land hereabouts," he said carelessly, as he pointed toward the earthworks which could be seen in every direction.

"That is just what we have been doing," the soldier said with evident pride. "From the preparations, it appears as if we should stay here a long while. There are ten redoubts in the line protecting the town; here are three, opening out on the river, there are two facing the river road to Williamsburg, three back of us," and the soldier motioned toward the rear of the town, "while two more are to the left."

"What's that over there?" Josh asked, pointing in the direction of the road leading to Hampton.

"It is what is called the Horn-work, a projecting redoubt. There are fourteen batteries in all, mounting sixty-five guns, and the Yankees will be given such a reception as must wipe them off the face of the earth, if that French boy makes any demonstration against us while we are here."

"There's a big crowd of men in our camp," Josh said boastingly.

"There might be five times as many, and yet it would be impossible to make an attack upon our inner works."

“How is that?”

“Half a mile from here, where you can see that cloud of dust rising, are three more redoubts; at Moore’s Mill are intrenchments, and near the river road from Williamsburg is the Fusileer’s Redoubt, a work garrisoned by the Twenty-third Foot, and a crowd of marines; I don’t claim the mermaids soldiers——”

“What are they?” Josh asked in surprise.

“Mermaids are what we call the marines; they are stationed with the Twenty-third over there where the frigate Gaudaloupe is anchored. Then in Gloucester,” and the soldier pointed proudly across the water, “is a line of intrenchments with four redoubts and three batteries, mounting nineteen guns.”

Josh could have hugged himself with very joy as the soldier thus gave him the information he had come to obtain. Without any special effort he had learned all General Lafayette wished to know; now it only remained that he should remember what had been told him, and make his way out of the camp.

No plan he could have conceived would have accomplished his purpose so quickly and thoroughly.

He gazed around intently, hoping the better to remember the information by fixing the landmarks in his mind, and the soldier, proud of the impression he had made upon the country lad, asked:

“Now what do you think would become of the colonials if they had the courage, which they haven’t, to make an attack?”

“It looks as if you was fixed pretty snug,” the alleged fisherman replied in a tone of admiration; “but what puzzles me is why General Cornwallis don’t go out an’ kill all our folks at once, instead of stayin’ here?”

“It is plain enough, my lad. We need a naval station down this way, and where could a better one be found? It is a good harbor, and a healthy place for a camp.”

Josh realized that his comrades would be anxious because of his long delay, yet he would not have abridged that interview by a single moment.

The guard whom he had been so fortunate as to be detained by, was a garrulous man, and continued to point out the natural advantages of the place until word was sent that the officer of the day would receive the newcomer.

“I can’t have more luck than I’ve had already,” Josh said to himself, following the messenger, the guard keeping close behind as if thinking the boy might attempt to escape. “It seems as if things were goin’ on most too smooth, an’ there may be breakers ahead.”

He was mentally prepared for the examination when ushered into the officer’s presence, and fully alive to all the dangers which might arise.

“Where do you live?” the Englishman asked abruptly.

“Up at the head of York River.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Waitin’ till you give me a chance to sell my fish.”

“Was that your purpose in visiting the camp?”

“Of course. What else would I want here, except to see the soldiers, but that wouldn't pay for so long a pull.”

“Have you ever been in the army?”

“Why that's where I am now, ain't it?” and Josh did his best to appear perplexed.

“I mean, have you ever been a soldier?”

“Not much I ain't. I can make more money takin' care of the farm, an' fishin' now an' then when the troops are handy to get at, without runnin' the danger of bein' killed.”

“Don't you have any desire to see the English forces driven out of the country?”

“Why should I?” Josh asked innocently and emphatically. “S'pose they wasn't here, where'd I sell my fish?”

The officer appeared to be satisfied with this reply, and continued the examination in a different line.

“Where did you last see the American soldiers?”

“Three days ago I was up to their camp.”

“Indeed? What did you see there?”

“Lots of men an' guns.”

“Are they intrenched?”

Josh realized if he admitted that his curiosity could be aroused by such matters, the officer would conclude he might carry information back, and therefore refuse to let him leave the camp.

“What's them?” he asked, as if not understanding the term.

“What defenses have they?”

Josh shook his head.

“Are you so dumb that you do not know what I mean?”

“I ain’t a soldier, mister, an’ so how can I tell?” he asked with a whine.

“Surely you have sense enough to know a fort when you see it!”

“I don’t reckon there was any up there, but I didn’t have time to look ’round very much. You see fish sold mighty fast, an’ we only stayed till the catch was cleaned up.”

“Why didn’t you go back there, instead of coming here?”

“Well, you see we had to come down the river a good bit to get a full load, an’ this camp was nearest when we’d taken what we could carry; besides I wanted to see the English.”

The officer looked at him a moment in silence, and then asked with the air of one who is about to bring an unprofitable interview to a close:

“Where have you been since coming ashore?”

“Jest here. The soldier we met wouldn’t let us go anywhere till we saw you.”

“How many are there in your party?”

“Three; me an’ my cousins.”

“Are they boys?”

“I reckon so, seein’s I’m the oldest.”

The officer summoned the guard who had brought Josh in, and said:

“You can let him dispose of his fish; but do not

allow either of the party to wander around the camp."

"How'll I sell my load if I can't come here with it?" Josh asked as if in distress.

"It is not my business to enable you to sell fish. Go away, and see to it that you do not loiter around."

"But I can come back with another load, can't I?"

"Take the idiot away!" the officer said sharply, and the soldier literally dragged the boy from the tent.

"Now you can set about the business of selling your fish, and after that has been done, see to it you go home," the man said when they were in the open air.

"I don't reckon it would do any harm to look 'round a little?"

The soldier glanced at Josh sharply.

"I thought you were in a great hurry?"

"So I am; but I never had such a chance before, an' it seems too bad not to make the most of it."

"The orders were to prevent you from loitering; but I don't suppose there can be any objection to your looking about a bit. Come with me while I carry this haddock to my quarters."

"Let me take it for you," and Josh seized the fish by the gills. "The rest of the folks will know what I've got to sell, an' I may do a little tradin'."

During the walk through the camp Josh kept

both eyes and ears open, as well can be imagined, but he did not learn more than had already been told him.

He had ample opportunity, however, to impress upon his mind the details of the information given regarding the defenses, and by the time the guard was at his quarters, Josh believed he would have no difficulty in remembering everything which it was necessary for the Americans to know.

The idle men in camp bantered the visitor considerably; but he took their coarse jests in good part, pretending not to understand them, and more than one engaged him to bring them fish.

Josh lingered considerably longer than was necessary, thinking it possible he might gain yet more information, and when he was on the point of departing in obedience to the demands of some of the men that he bring their wares to them, a familiar voice from one of the tents caused the blood to recede very suddenly from his cheeks.

“If I can’t nose ’round the Yankees’ camp, there ain’t a man this side the water that can, eh? I’ve done a heap of sich work for General Clinton, an’ only hope General Cornwallis will give me a chance.”

“Why didn’t you stay with the main army?” a voice asked.

“I was gettin’ too well known. A man can’t dodge in an’ out all the time, except he gets acquainted, eh?”

Sim Perkins was one of the speakers, Josh was

positive, and if they should meet for ever so short a time, Colonel Stewart would look in vain for the return of his messengers.

The tent in which the tory chanced to be at that moment was not more than ten feet from where Josh was standing, but fortunately he was at the rear of it, and, unless the occupants came out, might readily leave without attracting the attention of the man who could bring upon him an ignominious death.

“It’s time I was gettin’ away from this,” he said to himself. “How lucky I didn’t happen to go where he could see me!”

“When will you start for the other camp if General Cornwallis gives you employment?” Sim’s companion asked, and Josh waited to hear the reply.

“In an hour after the bargain’s made. There’s somethin’ important about to be done by Washington’s forces, an’ I reckon it’ll be possible to find out all the partic’lars by a visit there.”

Josh had learned enough. That which Colonel Stewart wished to know could be told, if he returned in safety, and, in addition, he might prevent the news of General Washington’s change of base being known by this portion of the English forces, yet a little while longer.

He was not as eager to leave as he previously had been to remain; but it so chanced that the soldier who had unwittingly given him such valuable information, came up once more, and said gruffly:

“The officer of the day wants to see you again. I’ve got a wiggling for letting you loiter around here so long. Why didn’t you go back to your boat?”

Josh did not dare speak loud lest Sim should recognize his voice, therefore he was suddenly attacked by a severe fit of coughing, during which he moved as far as possible from the tent.

Now he was thoroughly alarmed by the prospect of a second visit to the officer of the day. At any moment Sim might lounge near the quarters, and it seemed as if danger threatened on every hand.

“I didn’t think I’d stayed sich a dreadful while,” he said in a low tone. “What’s the use of my seein’ that feller ag’in? I’ll go right away this minute. My cousins must be wonderin’ where I am.”

“It’s too late now ; you’ve got to be overhauled, an’ I count on your tellin’ that I ordered you off at once.”

“I’ll fix that part of it all right ; but it’s too bad to have to stop so long.”

The soldier was too deeply occupied with the unpleasant thought that he might receive a severe reprimand for what had been done, to pay any attention to the boy’s remark, and the young spy was forced to follow.

“What are you lounging here for?” the officer asked sternly when finally Josh stood before him. “I thought you only wanted to sell fish?”

“That’s what I’m ’bout dyin’ to do now. You see I didn’t think I’d been here so long till this

feller come up in a fit 'cause I hadn't done what he told me. Some of the soldiers was bargainin' for fish, an' I was makin' sich good trades it seemed a pity not to keep at it."

The officer looked sternly at Josh, and then asked the soldier :

"What was he doing when you found him?"

"Just as he says, sir, trying to sell his fish."

"Did he have them with him?"

"They are down in the boat," Josh interrupted, "an' I was agreein' to bring 'em up."

"Is that the truth?" and the officer turned again to the guard.

"So far as I know, sir. Several of the men have made purchases of him, but the goods have not been delivered."

"See to it that he goes to his boat at once, and allow neither him nor his companions to return. If the soldiers wish to buy fish, they can go to the river. Such visitors are never to be trusted, and I will have none of them in camp."

"I won't come ag'in, sir," Josh said penitently. "If I'd knowed it was any harm, I'd left a good while ago."

"It hasn't done any harm, my lad, but—a military camp is not a huckster's shop, that is all, and while we are glad to have the inhabitants supply us with food, for which a fair price shall be paid, we cannot allow them too near. When you have anything more to sell, remain on the shore, and the men can visit you there."

A wave of the officer's hand told him the interview had come to an end, and once more Josh mentally congratulated himself on his good fortune.

"You kept your promise, lad, and got me out of what might have been serious trouble, so if I can ever do you another good turn I won't forget this," the guard said when they emerged from the tent.

"You've treated me in great shape," Josh replied, emphatically. "There ain't anybody 'round here that could have done more, an' I'm much obliged."

He spoke hurriedly, for no one could say how soon Sim Perkins might come upon the scene, and the soldier gave him a military salute in parting, so pleased by the expressions of the boy's gratitude as to forget entirely his order to make certain he left the camp.

So far as this last was concerned, there was no necessity for any one to quicken Josh's movements. His great desire was to get away immediately, and he ran with all speed toward the beach.

The expression on the faces of Ben and Ned when he arrived told how great was their relief at seeing him once more.

The cargo of fish was nearly disposed of, and several soldiers were in the immediate vicinity, therefore it was not practicable for him to explain why their departure should be hurried.

"Where have you been?" Ned asked. "I began to think something had happened."

"I had to answer a lot of questions before they'd agree to let us sell the fish, an' then a good many

made trades with me, so I reckon it won't be best to dicker any more now. We've been ordered to pull further up the shore."

"What's that for?" one of the soldiers asked, suspicious, as Josh in his excitement feared.

"I don't know. The officer was mad 'cause I sold things in camp, an' said that the men would have to come to us if they wanted to buy."

"Then you can't deliver what has been engaged?"

"I can, for we'll wait in our boat till the men show up."

While speaking Josh had been making ready for departure, but Ben and Ned, not realizing how important it was for them to leave in the shortest possible space of time, lingered on shore until he said sharply :

"Why don't you fellers turn to with me? I'm goin' to pull out to that vessel, an' then come back here."

Ned now began to understand that there was good reason to make haste, and the supposed fishermen were soon rowing toward the frigate Charon.

"Now perhaps you will tell us what was the matter. Were you discovered?"

"I shouldn't be here if that had happened," Josh replied with a grimace; "but matters would have been in bad shape for me if I'd happened to pass the front of the tent in which Sim Perkins was sittin'."

"Is Sim here?" Ben cried in alarm, and Ned looked very uneasy.

“Pull a little slower, an’ I’ll tell the whole story.”

The boat was headed toward the frigate Charon, but the distance between her and the shore was so great that Josh had time to give a full account of his adventures before more than half the distance had been covered.

“That settles it!” Ned said when the story was concluded. “We must go back as soon as possible. Why are we going out to the frigate?”

“I only said what I did so the soldiers wouldn’t wonder why we came away before the fish were sold. We’ll circle ’round the vessel, in case anybody is lookin’, an’ then sneak up river.”

“We had better start at once, instead of spending both time and strength pulling around for nothing. We’ve got a hard job before us, and the sooner we’re beyond sight of the camp the easier I shall feel,” Ben said nervously.

“It won’t do to go jest yet. The officer of the day had a good mind to be suspicious, an’ if he should see us scootin’ for dear life, he’d be certain to send after us. We’d better waste half an hour, than never have a chance to go back.”

“Josh is right,” Ned said decidedly. “The least false move would mean death for all. We’ll try to sell some fish on the frigate, and then row up stream as if our cargo had all been disposed of. It was fortunate that soldier was so friendly, otherwise we would be obliged to go back without getting the information we were sent to obtain.”

“Yes, I’ve had great luck all through this trip, from the time we got ready to leave Bennington,” Josh replied; “but I tell you what it is, fellers, when I heard Sim Perkins talkin’ like he was at home, my heart went way down into my boots, for I allowed the end had come, in spite of all our luck.”

While they were yet some distance from the frigate a marine hailed, asking their business, and Josh replied :

“We’re got some fish to sell; don’t you want ’em?”

“Sheer off! The orders are to allow no boats around the frigate. Sheer off, or I’ll fire!”

“Put the tiller hard down, Ben,” Josh said quickly. “I reckon we ain’t wanted here, an’ had better get home mighty lively.”

Had any one been on the shore, watching the movements of the supposed fishermen, no suspicions could have been aroused when they rowed up the river at the best possible speed. “It would not be surprising that three country lads were terribly frightened when a gun was aimed at them, and Josh said with a chuckle as he pulled vigorously at the oar :

“The soldier what was so perlite to me made fun of marines—called ’em mermaids; but I’ll never say a word ag’in ’em from this time out, for that feller did us the biggest kind of a favor when he threatened to shoot. Now we’ll buckle down to the oars, an’ keep ’em dippin’ as long as we can set on the thwarts!”

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ENFORCED HALT.

Not until an hour passed, and the boat was so far up the river that Yorktown had been lost to view in the distance, did the boys feel assured of safety. They had rowed vigorously, without ceasing their efforts for an instant, and Josh said as he pulled in his oar:

“I reckon we can afford to hold on a bit. I’ve kept this thing up about as long, without a breathing-spell, as is possible.”

“Better work the boat in-shore before you stop, or the current will carry us back.”

Josh did as was suggested, and when the bow of the craft was on the sand, the young spies gave themselves up to a short time of rest, which was sadly needed.

In order to husband their strength, no conversation had been indulged in from the moment the flight began, and now Ben and Ned were eager their companion should repeat the story of his adventures with more detail than had previously been given.

Master Higgins did as was requested, and an hour

was spent in describing to his comrades the defenses of Yorktown as pointed out by the garrulous soldier. He did this quite as much for his own benefit as their information, since by repeating the story he would the better be able to remember what had been learned.

“I reckon Colonel Stewart will be satisfied with our work,” he said in conclusion, “for even if we had done nothin’ more than found out what Sim’s got on hand, the time would have been well spent. His business as a spy will come to an end mighty soon after he strikes General Lafayette’s camp.”

“I suppose he’ll be hanged if he’s taken,” Ben ventured.

“Of course.”

“It seems hard to send a man to such a death.”

“I don’t believe it will worry me very much,” Josh replied carelessly. “If it did I’d remember what he’s done against the colonists, an’ then I wouldn’t be very soft-hearted.”

“But think how terrible it must be to know you’ve been the means of sending a man to the gallows,” Ben persisted.

“It ain’t so awful pleasant, I’ll admit; but how long would he have hesitated if he’d seen me? I’d been hauled up as a spy quicker’n you could wink, after he found out I was there, an’ you fellers would soon have been in the same box.”

This argument silenced Ben, but did not convince him. If Sim’s punishment would be a long term of imprisonment, he could hope ardently to

aid in capturing him before he might work further harm to the American cause; but to assist in bringing a man to the gallows was repugnant.

The subject was dropped, however, when Ned said, as if just aroused from deep thought:

“It won’t do for us to hang around here much longer. We are not out of danger yet, and must put as many miles as possible between us and Yorktown before morning.”

Josh immediately pushed the boat from the shore, took his station at one of the oars, and the flight was resumed.

Each hour the position of the crew was changed, that one of the party might be “spelled” by taking his turn at steering, and until nearly midnight the progress was not delayed more than a few moments at a time.

It was now believed they were no longer in danger of meeting detachments of the English army, and all hands were so thoroughly tired that a prolonged halt seemed absolutely necessary.

“We shall travel just so much faster to-morrow, if we get a few hours of sleep,” Ben said pleadingly. “It seems as if I really couldn’t keep my eyes open a minute longer.”

Ned seconded his friend’s suggestion and Josh reluctantly agreed to pulling ashore.

He had done more actual work than either of the others, but yet appeared as fresh and able as on the night they left the American camp.

“Of course we must stop if you fellers are worn

out," he said as he leaped ashore; "but yet it seems like a waste of time."

"I don't understand why you are not as tired as we," Ned replied in a tone of admiration for his comrade's endurance. "You have done twice as much work as either of us."

"I reckon it's because I'm more used to bein' knocked 'round; that kinder toughens a feller you know."

"Don't you feel played out?"

"Not so much but that when I think of the narrow squeak we had at the Britishers' camp, it seems easier to keep on to a place of safety than stop this side of General Lafayette's forces."

"There can be no danger here," Ned said positively as he searched for a place in the bushes where he could lie down with some degree of comfort.

"I don't reckon there is, an' yet we'll all be more certain when we're where we started from."

Then Master Higgins, giving very little heed to his resting-place, stretched himself out at full length under a bush, and before the others had fairly settled down was breathing heavily.

Neither of the party had any difficulty in summoning slumber to his eyelids, and until nearly daybreak they enjoyed perfect, dreamless repose.

Then all three were awakened suddenly by a harsh voice.

"It's time you thieves turned out, an' give an account of yourselves!"

Springing to his feet Josh was confronted by a

man who was leveling a cocked and primed musket directly at him.

“What’s goin’ on here?” he demanded.

“We’re to have a settlement mighty soon, I reckon, an’ you young thieves will do the heaviest part of the settlin’.”

Josh leaned forward slightly to get a better view of the stranger, and when his eyes were accustomed to the gloom, he cried in dismay :

“It’s Bart Hodgkins !”

“I see there ain’t no call for me to introduce myself. Keep back!” he added as Ned was about to step forward. “You cubs will get along to the boat, where I can have an eye on all three at the same time. Move lively, for I shan’t be backward ’bout shootin’, after what you did to me.”

“How did you get here?” Josh cried, hardly conscious of what he said.

“Did you reckon them hosses was the only ones in the country?” Bart asked with a chuckle. “We found others mighty soon, an’ they must a’ been better than them you stole, ’cause we’ve got here in time to head you off from whatever you was countin’ on doin’ with the Yankee army.”

“But we——”

Josh interrupted Ben at once, believing he was about to say that they had already been with the American forces. It was not necessary Bart should know this, and to keep it a secret might benefit them in some way, although at the time he could not have said how.

“Is Sim Perkins with you?”

“He will be afore long, an’ then I’ll show you what it means to put a bullet in my arm. Get together, an’ stand close! There won’t be any more chance to cut capers with me.”

The boys marched to the water’s edge in compliance with his commands, and were now grouped around the bow of the boat.

“Don’t let on that we’ve either seen General Lafayette, or know where Sim is,” Josh whispered to Ben.

“The next time you go to sleep in the woods, I reckon you’ll keep your muskets where they can be got at handy,” Bart said triumphantly. “You counted you’d seen the last of me, when that little scrimmage was over, but I’ve kept close at your heels all the time.”

Ned was sorely tempted to tell him this was a lie; but he realized that the less information given the better, and held his peace.

Bart seated himself with his back to a tree, and prepared to hold his prisoners in subjection with the leveled musket.

“Get up there!” he shouted as Josh was about to seat himself on the bow of the boat. “Keep on your feet, or I’ll fix you so you’ll *have* to lay down!”

“But what’s the use of makin’ us stand up?”

“I want you to, that’s why! You’ll keep on your pins till Sim shows up, an’ then I’m goin’ to mark all three same’s you marked me.”

Josh made no reply to this threat, which, under other circumstances, would have called forth a retort from him. He understood that Sim had left Bart at this place while he visited the English camp, and there was every reason to believe the tory would soon return as a spy in the service of General Cornwallis. Once he saw the boys, he would suspect that they had been, or were going, to Yorktown, and might decide to take them back there.

“If we wait till Sim comes we shall be in about as bad a hole as if he’d seen us yesterday,” Josh said to himself. “Luck must be turnin’ ag’in me, or we’d never stopped at the only place on the river where we could have got into trouble.”

During the next ten minutes neither captor nor prisoners broke the silence.

Day was dawning, and each instant surrounding objects could be seen more distinctly.

Bart, his shoulder bandaged with dirty cloths, and his right arm in a sling, appeared on the point of falling asleep, and Josh whispered softly :

“Keep as quiet as you can. We’ve got to get out of this scrape before Sim comes, an’ if I see the slimmest chance to jump in on Bart, I shall do it. Be ready to back me up.”

“Remember that he has a musket, and there’s death in it for one of us, unless he is taken un-awares,” Ned replied, while Ben turned pale at the thought of a possible struggle.

“He can’t fire but once, for we could pull him

down before the gun was loaded ag'in, an' it's better for one of us to get hurt than to be here when Sim turns up. We'd go back to the English camp for certain."

"What are you chinnin' about?" Bart asked with an oath. "Keep your mouths shut, or somebody'll get hurt!"

Now Josh regretted having spoken to his companions, for by so doing he had roused their captor at a time when slumber seemed very heavy on his eyelids. He gave Ned a warning look, which was as if he said the order must be strictly obeyed, and stood silent and motionless with his eyes fixed upon the tory.

Five minutes passed; Bart nodded, and at the same instant Josh moved forward a pace.

When the tory looked up his prisoners were apparently as they had been.

Ned understood that Josh was about to take advantage of the first opportunity presented, regardless of the danger to himself.

Five minutes, and the boy had succeeded in lessening the distance between himself and the sleepy man by a few inches more.

The sun was rising; but, fortunately for the prisoners, Bart was protected by the bushes from the full glare of its rays, and was not disturbed by the increase of light.

Then came a weary time of waiting, during which it seemed to Ben as if his heart was beating sufficiently loud to be heard a long distance off, and Bart's head sank upon his breast.

Josh gave one hurried glance at Ned to warn him the decisive moment had come, and then, with the quickness of a cat when she pounces on a mouse, leaped directly upon the man.

Ned sprang forward at the same instant. Ben heard the report of a musket, and after that a few seconds elapsed before the smoke of that burning powder cleared away sufficiently for him to see what had happened.

As a matter of course the musket was now valueless as a weapon, since the contents had been discharged, but it seemed as if Bart might prove more than a match for the two boys, wounded though he was, for he had them both beneath him.

“Club him with the musket!” Josh shouted, and then a gurgling sound told that Bart had seized him by the throat.

While one might have counted ten Ben stood silent and motionless, making no move toward assisting his comrades, and then his habitual timidity disappeared like a flash.

Seizing the musket he raised it above his head, and rushed among the combatants.

He no longer thought of danger; but was like one in a frenzy of rage.

Bart, relaxing his efforts against those beneath him, gave Ben such a kick full in the stomach as doubled the boy up, and by catching hold of a bush he succeeded in saving himself from a fall.

An instant later the clubbed musket fell with a crashing force on the tory's head, and the struggle was over.

“That’s what I call a neat blow,” Josh said approvingly, as he dragged himself from beneath the apparently lifeless man. “It didn’t come any too soon, either. I thought he’d choke me to death before you got a chance to get in your work.”

“Have I killed him?” Ben asked in tones of horror as he bent over the tory, who, ghastly pale, was lying like one dead.

The boy’s sudden-born courage had vanished as quickly as it came, and in its stead was the faintness of fear, caused by the thought that he had killed a human being.

“Dead? Not a bit of it?” Josh cried cheerily as he assisted Ned to rise. “You don’t kill them kind of cattle so easy. He’ll come ’round in a little while, an’ before that happens we’d better have him in sich a shape that he can’t do any mischief.”

“I didn’t suppose he could make so much of a fight,” Ned said as he rubbed his bruised throat tenderly. “If it hadn’t been for the wound, I’m not so certain he wouldn’t have got the best of all three.”

“He had me where I was of no account,” Josh added with a laugh. “I’ve been in some pretty snug places, but that grip on my throat beat everything. This is the time when Ben distinguished himself.”

“Yes,” the latter said in a voice which trembled despite all his efforts to render it steady. “There is a good deal of bravery in knocking a man senseless at a time when he couldn’t defend himself.”

“I thought he was makin’ a mighty good try for it when he tumbled you into the bushes.”

“That was all he could do, and then I had the advantage.”

“Well,” Josh said as he overhauled some of the stouter fishing-lines, “whether you did anything brave or not, you come in jest ’bout right, so far as time goes. In half a minute more I’d been done up. Now we’ll lash Mr. Hodgkins so he can’t flounder ’round very much, an’ then mosey up river.”

“What are you counting on doing with him?” Ned asked as he assisted his companion.

“Take him with us, of course. It’ll never do to let him see Sim before we get back to camp, or we shan’t catch that precious villain, I want to be a soldier pretty bad, but that don’t count as anything alongside of bringin’ Sim Perkins up with a sharp turn.”

It was not a lengthy operation to tie Bart in such a manner that he could not free himself, and by the time the task had been accomplished the tory opened his eyes.

“Well, Mr. Hodgkins,” Josh cried mockingly, “there’s been somethin’ of a change here since you an’ I talked together. I reckon there ain’t any need of waitin’ for your friend Perkins, so if you’re ready we’ll leave. You’ve got an invitation to go with us, an’ I hope you won’t be so cruel as to say anythin’ ag’in it.”

“I’ll have your heart’s blood for this.”

“I haven’t got time to get it out for you now, an’

we must be movin'. Don't agitate yourself; we'll lift you into the boat like you was a lady."

Bart, powerless to move hand or foot, simply glared at his captors, and Josh had begun to drag him toward the boat, when Ben cried excitedly :

"Here comes some kind of a craft! Perhaps Sim is in her!"

Instantly he heard this, Bart began to scream for help, and had the strange boat been a little nearer his shrieks must have been heard.

"Stop that!" Josh cried as he covered the tory's mouth with his hand. "Can't one of you fellers find somethin' that'll do for a gag? The chances are it's Sim comin' to meet his pardner, an' we've got to put an end to this screechin'."

"It won't do to stand out here where he can see us," Ned added. "Pull Bart into the bushes. Here's the sleeve of my coat. I reckon that will answer your purpose."

While speaking he cut the garment referred to, tossing one of the pieces to Josh at the same time he ran toward the boat.

"We've got to get the craft out of the water mighty quick. Give me a hand, Ben; Josh can attend to Bart."

"But why don't we go, instead of stopping here?" Ben asked as he obeyed his friend's commands. "We can keep ahead of him easily enough."

"We must let him go by, if it is him," Josh cried. "It would never do to show ourselves?"

Then, having dragged the prisoner under the bushes, Master Higgins ran to assist his comrades.

Ben was quite positive they were making a mistake in remaining there, instead of taking to flight. If they could see the occupant of the boat, surely he had been able to see them quite as plainly as if they pulled up the river in their own craft.

“We ain’t got time to figger much on the matter now,” Josh said as he worked with a will. “After we’re in shape to meet Mr. Perkins, or watch him as he goes past, we can talk about how things oughter be done.”

Ned obeyed without question every order Josh gave. The boy had proven himself such a capable leader that his judgment could well be accepted without hesitation.

It was no slight task to carry their boat into the thicket; but it was finally accomplished, and there, where the foliage entirely hid her from view, she was laid on one side, thus forming a barricade in case of a conflict.

“I don’t know much ’bout buildin’ redoubts, sich as that soldier crowed over; but here’s one after our own fashion that won’t come amiss if that feller in the boat is Sim, an’ he finds out we’re here.”

Bart was carried behind the “fortification” with but little regard for his personal comfort in the manner of transportation, and with him went his musket and ammunition.

These preparations had been made so hurriedly that when they were completed the approaching craft was yet half a mile distant.

“ You two stay here, an’ I’ll sneak out till I know who it is, an’ whether there’s a chance of his landin’ here.”

He was absent not more than ten minutes, and returned hurriedly as he said softly :

“ It’s Sim sure enough, an’ he’s alone. The boat is headed straight for this place, where I reckon he counts on pickin’ up Bart.”

The gentleman referred to, hearing the words, rolled his eyes at Josh in what he probably intended should be a terrifying manner.

“ You’d like to have a chance to give one screech, wouldn’t you ?” Josh asked as he prodded the man with the butt of his own musket. “ Well, if you *should* happen to get that gag out while he’s here, an’ tried anything of the kind, I’d shoot you mighty quick. The game we’re playin’ now is one in which the crowd that gets whipped stands a good show of bein’ hanged, an’ I don’t mean to be on that side, specially if killin’ you would prevent it.”

“ Tell us just what you count on doing, Josh ?” Ben asked. “ It seems as if we oughter know, more particularly since I believe our wisest course would have been to run away.”

“ I can easy show you how that would have been foolish. Allow we went, we’d have to take Bart with us. That would make the boat jest so much harder to pull, an’ when Sim found his pardner was missin’, he’d be certain we lugged him off. That means he’d chase us, in a light craft, an’ with a musket that’ll carry a ball a long distance. If we

escaped, he'd know we went to the American lines, an' wouldn't show his nose there. It don't seem to me as if we'd cut a very nice figger in sich a game."

"What do you gain by stopping here?"

"We'll get hold of both the precious villains. If Sim saw us haul the boat out the water, he knows there are three of us, an' it is only reasonable for him to suppose we've all got muskets. He won't care to fight very long ag'in sich odds, an' he'll leave; but without knowin' who we are, so he'll keep on to do as he's agreed with General Cornwallis. We follow a dozen or so hours behind, an' catch him in camp before he has a chance to give us the slip."

"What if he decided to drive us out? It can't take many minutes to find this boat."

"That's true enough; but she's so hid by the bushes that he won't know we've only one gun among three, an' will be kinder skeery 'bout riskin' his precious skin ag'in a party what can stay under cover while he's got to stand out in the open. Hark! He's callin' for Bart! We'll keep quiet, an' not do any fightin' unless he begins it."

CHAPTER XIV.

A STERN CHASE.

It was only possible for the boys to see Sim from time to time, so dense was the foliage which hid them from view; but the slightest sound could readily be heard, and thus they were able to follow his movements accurately.

During five minutes or more he sat in the boat calling Bart by name, and the helpless prisoner did his best to remove the gag, that he might make known his whereabouts, until Josh threatened him with the butt of his musket.

"He's landing," Ned said at length, as he peered through the leaves. "It won't do to let him get very near."

"I'll stand ready to fire— Say, why wouldn't it be a good idea to cripple him at the first chance, and Josh pressed forward eagerly, as if about to carry his plan into execution before it could be discussed.

"I don't like the idea of such a thing," Ned replied in a doubtful tone, while Ben objected strenuously.

"It wouldn't be right to shoot unless we were certain he really intends to act the part of a spy," Ned said in a whisper. "Besides, one prisoner is about

as much as we can take care of during the remainder of the journey."

"He'll never stop actin' the spy as long as there's a shillin' to be made by it; but I reckon you're right 'bout luggin' him so far. If he keeps away, well an' good; but in case he gets too near we must settle matters, for once he finds out how we're fixed there'll be trouble for us."

Sim stood on the shore looking hastily around while he continued to shout for Bart, and then suddenly, as if having seen something to alarm him, leaped on board the craft, rowing rapidly up the river.

"He's found where we'd hauled the boat out, an' don't like the looks of things," Josh said with a chuckle of satisfaction. "We can be pretty certain he didn't see us on the shore, or he'd never landed. Sim Perkins don't fight 'less he's cornered, an' then it takes a good man to handle him."

The boys crept out from their place of concealment to where a view of the river could be gained, and there watched the tory until he disappeared from sight.

"Now he's between us and the camp," Ben said in a tone of dissatisfaction. "I can't see how we've got the best of this business."

"It'll be easier to keep out of his way while we're behind, than if he was chasin' us," Josh replied. "We can go our own gait now; but must take good care he doesn't slip past us on his way

back. I don't allow he'll stop a great while after hearin' General Washington is on his way here, an' that he's sure to find out before bein' in camp an hour.

Then Josh went back to where the prisoner had been left, and, removing the gag that Bart might be able to reply to his questions, said:

"Sim has gone on, bound for General Lafayette's camp, so we shan't be bothered with him for quite a spell.

"You're carryin' things with a high hand jest now; but my turn'll come, and when it does you'll wish you'd never seen this part of the country," Bart growled.

"That's all right. I believe what you say, so there's no need of wastin' time threatenin'. We're goin' to leave in an hour or so, an' you'll go with us. Our provisions have been used up, an' all hands will be hungry for the next twenty-four hours, 'less you're willin' to tell me where your stock is, for it don't stand to reason Sim left you without grub enough to last till he got back.

"You'll starve if you wait for me to tell you!"

"All right, only we don't allow to do the starvin'. It won't be hard to pick up somethin' along the river; but we shan't spend much time foragin' for you. It's a case of mighty short allowance; but *we* can manage somehow," and Josh moved away as if he had no further interest in the conversation.

Bart understood what would be the result if he

remained silent, and the idea of being without food for twenty-four hours caused him to feel hungry at once.

“Hold on!” he cried with a groan, and Josh turned back. “Give me some water now, an’ I’ll tell all you want to know.”

“Better free your mind first, an’ then there won’t be so much chance of goin’ back on your word.”

“But I’m almost dead for a drink. That blow you gave me was a tough one, an’ nearly sets me wild with pain.”

Ben overheard this appeal, and since he had been the one who struck the man down, it seemed imperative he should minister to his wants. Running to the river he soon returned with a can of water, but Josh prevented him from carrying out his charitable intentions immediately.

“Hold on a bit,” he said, seizing Ben’s arm, “I’ve known this feller longer’n you have, an’ don’t have any too much faith in him. If he needs the water very bad, it won’t take but a minute for him to tell what I want to know.”

“All the grub I’ve got is back here in the bushes about two hundred yards, along a path you’ll find jest below where you landed,” Bart said quickly.

“How did you happen to wait here while Sim went to see the Britishers?”

“That was his scheme; he thought he’d make a better trade by goin’ alone; but I believe it was ’cause he counted on gettin’ the best end of the

bargain for himself. Now give me the water, will you?"

Josh released his hold of Ben's arm, and the latter ministered to the prisoner's wants as tenderly as a woman might have done, Master Higgins setting out in search of the store of provisions.

Ten minutes later he returned to the improvised barricade with a generous supply of bacon, corn-meal, potatoes, and a frying-pan.

"I reckon we'll have one square feed before tacklin' them oars ag'in," he said as he began his preparations for cooking. "The tories didn't mean to starve while on this trip, an' by now Sim must be wishin' he had his share of the stuff."

No time was wasted in making the meal ready, and the boys ate heartily, Ben feeding the prisoner after his own hunger had been appeased.

Then the boat was taken to the water, Bart's outfit stowed inside, and the boys carried their prisoner on board, placing him in the stern where the helmsman could attend to his wants.

About two hours had elapsed since Sim disappeared from view, and Josh said, when the preparations were made:

"I reckon we can afford to start now. He'll be pullin' for all he's worth, but we'll take things easy."

"See here," Bart said with a whine as the boys were about to put off, "what's the use of takin' me with you? It'll be a heap easier if I'm left behind. I can't do you any harm now you've got my

musket, an' I'll promise to make tracks for home. I have had enough of this kind of work, and wouldn't have started in it but for Sim."

"We're willin' to take it a little harder for the sake of keepin' you with us," Josh replied with a laugh. "We don't have so much faith in your promise that we can afford to run many chances on it."

"But what harm could I do you?"

"That's what I don't know, an' shan't find out by tryin' the experiment."

"Where are you countin' on takin' me?"

"To General Lafayette."

"What for?"

"Jest to show him how a tory looks."

"But I haven't done anything ag'in him."

"That's 'cause you didn't have the chance, an' we want to make certain you're where no mischief can be done. There's no use talkin' 'bout it," he added as Bart was on the point of making another appeal. "You're to go with us, an' that settles it."

Ben looked sympathizingly at the prisoner, and his comrades understood that if the decision had been left to him, the tory would soon be free to plot again against his countrymen.

The boys pulled with a steady stroke when the boat was pushed off from the bank, and at every bend in the river slowed up to make certain Sim was nowhere in sight, for their purpose was to keep so far in the rear he would remain in ignorance of the fact that they were following.

Not until sunset did they make a stop, and then it was for the purpose of cooking another meal from the provisions furnished by Bart.

All were thoroughly tired, but there was no thought of prolonging the halt.

Ned built the fire while Josh was cutting the bacon, and as soon as the food had been cooked and eaten they were under way once more, with no intention of stopping again until sunrise.

In this respect they failed to carry out the programme decided upon.

At two o'clock in the morning they were so weary that even Josh was willing to call a halt, and the boat was hauled up on the shore near a thicket in which they would find shelter from the dew.

No watch was kept while they slept; Sim was their only enemy in that vicinity, and it was reasonable to suppose he would push ahead until reaching the American lines, therefore they had nothing to fear.

The boys and their prisoner slept soundly every moment of the four hours, which was the time agreed upon for the halt, and when they were awakened Josh had breakfast ready.

"I count that Sim is in the American camp by this time," Master Higgins said while they were eating. "He'll find out in short order what was happenin' at General Washington's quarters when he saw it last, an' most likely will be in a hurry to tell Cornwallis the news before anybody can get ahead of him."

“Well?” Ned asked as Josh paused.

“Well, it stands us in hand to keep a mighty sharp lookout from now on. Sim must never get back to Yorktown, no matter what it costs us to stop him.”

“But you are only guessing he’ll attempt to go back to-day,” Ben suggested.

“That’s all; but it seems the reasonable idea. It won’t cost much time to make certain, an’ a good deal depends on us jest now.”

When they set out again, Bart’s musket, loaded and carefully primed, was placed where Master Higgins could reach it at a moment’s warning.

The order to the helmsman was to come up under the lee of every bend in the river, and the banks on either side were to be scrutinized closely to learn if Sim had landed.

In such careful fashion the boys proceeded at about half the speed which would have been possible under other circumstances, and the day passed without anything having been seen of the spy.

They had sailed from the York into the Pamunkey River, and when the sun set were in a narrow portion of the stream, on either side of which were high banks.

“We must be getting close to the American lines,” Ned said as the boat was headed for the shore that supper might be prepared.

“I reckon we are,” the cook replied; “but it looks to me as if we’d better not go any further to-night.”

“Why not? We can reach the camp by morning, and it is necessary General Lafayette should know the result of our visit.”

“That news can wait when Sim is to be stopped from goin’ back to the Britishers. It’s certain he knows by this time that General Washington is about to make a move, an’ almost as certain he’ll leave the camp before another day dawns. Here we can count pretty safe on bein’ able to stop him, while if we go further up he may have a better chance to give us the slip.”

This time it was Ned who believed Josh was taking too many chances in order to make a prisoner of Sim, and he said so plainly.

“I’m sorry if that’s the way you feel about it,” Josh replied mournfully, “but it can’t be helped, you’ll have to go on, I reckon.”

“What do you mean?” and Ben looked alarmed.

“Why do you say *we* will go on?”

“Because I’m going to stop here.”

“But we mustn’t separate,” Ned cried.

“Neither must Sim be allowed to carry the news to the Britishers. You keep on, an’ I’ll stop. You *may* find that he hasn’t had a chance to leave camp, an’ in that case I reckon one of the soldiers will be willin’ to bring me word.”

Ned and Ben looked at each other in dismay.

Neither of them cared to continue the journey without Josh, and both were opposed to risking an encounter with the tory in the night.

“I’m sorry you fellers can’t think ’bout this

thing the same way I do," Josh said after a long pause ; " I don't believe we've got a right to leave here where we can keep the whole river in view until daylight, when there ain't much danger of his slippin' past."

"That settles it," Ned replied with more show of temper than he had ever displayed. " We must stop, of course ; but when it's two to one you should give in."

"So I would if we wasn't fixed exactly as we are," and understanding how useless it was to prolong the conversation while his companions were in their present humor, Josh gave all his attention to cooking the meal.

"You fellers have been in Lafayette's camp already?" Bart said musingly, and Ned knowing nothing could now be gained by denying the fact, replied :

"Yes, an' paid a visit to the Britishers as well, so you can see we didn't put very much faith in your statement that you'd kept close at our heels since the scrimmage in the woods."

"It beats creation how you've fooled us all the way along," Bart muttered half to himself, and Ned regretted that he had made any objections to remaining over night in this place, as he thought that but for Josh the men would not have been "fooled" so thoroughly.

When supper had been eaten Master Higgins prepared for a night's vigil.

The boat was pushed sufficiently far from the

shore to permit of her remaining afloat, yet not at such a distance but that she could be boarded readily, and there anchored.

The musket was looked to carefully to make certain it was in perfect working order, and then Josh said :

“ Now you fellers can turn in.”

“ We don't intend that you shall stand watch alone,” Ned said decidedly. “ Even though I didn't believe in halting here so long, I expect to carry out your plan fully.”

“ But there's no need for more than one of us to keep guard. It won't be so dark but that I will see a boat some time before it can reach the narrows, and then you shall be awakened.”

“ What do you intend to do if he comes ?”

“ Pull right out into the stream so he can't row past, an' make him surrender.”

“ He'll shoot you before that happens,” Bart growled.

“ I don't believe he will. Before he knows we're here, I shall cover him with your musket, and fire if he makes a single motion to pick up his gun. Now try to sleep, an' I promise to give warnin' in time. If no one shows up, you'll be in good condition for to-morrow's work.”

“ Why not let me do my share ?” Ned asked.

“ Because I couldn't go to sleep if I laid down,” and as a ready way of bringing the conversation to a close, Josh walked rapidly up river, keeping well within the shadow of the bushes.

It was a dreary vigil during the first half of the night.

The silence was so profound, as to be almost oppressive, and many times he was forced to exert all his will power against the inclination to sleep.

He had begun to fancy he was foolish in taking the precaution of remaining at this place, when a faint sound in the distance caused him to start forward eagerly.

The water served as a good conductor for the noise which had broken the silence, and in a few moments there could be no mistake as to its nature.

It was the sound of oars, and Josh felt positive the late-comer was none other than the tory whom he was so eager to capture.

Stealing softly back to where his comrades lay sleeping, he awakened Ned.

“Somebody’s pullin’ down stream, and I reckon it’s Sim. You must gag Bart, an’ see that it’s done so he can’t so much as squeak. Then come down to the boat; I’ll be there.”

Ned aroused Ben, and the two boys obeyed the order given, despite Bart’s most earnest protests that he would not so much as “yip” if allowed free use of his mouth.

There was no time to argue with him, and in an expeditious manner the prisoner was rendered powerless to give an alarm.

Josh had the bow of the boat against the bank when the boys arrived.

“You are to pull straight out in the stream, an’

then turn her head up, when I give the word," he whispered. "After that's been done, lay down in the bottom."

"What for?"

"In case he shoots before I can."

"We don't intend to shirk any danger, Josh, and shall sit just as straight as you do," Ned said hotly.

Master Higgins made no reply. The fever of excitement that had come upon him was too great to permit of many words. It was necessary he should conquer his nerves before the decisive moment came, and Ned's remark passed almost unheeded.

There was no need of watching the approaching craft; the splashing of water by the oars told plainly of the advance.

"Be ready now," Josh whispered in a tremulous voice. "Don't strike the water till I give the word, an' then pull the best you know how!"

There was a time of anxious suspense, which seemed very long, although not more than three or four minutes elapsed, and then, just as the bow of the approaching boat could be seen around the point, Josh gave the signal.

Master Higgins' weapon was already raised, and the instant the occupant of the craft could be seen, it was leveled at his head.

"Make a single move an' I'll kill you!" Josh cried in a loud voice. "Drop the oars, an' hold up your hands!"

Sim, for the newcomer was none other than he, could see the barrel of the musket shimmering in



“Make a single move and I’ll shoot you,” Josh cried in a loud voice. “Drop the oars and hold up your hands.”—Page 202.



the rays of the moon, and although far from being a coward, he was not foolhardy.

Almost any ordinary marksman should be able to send a bullet that distance with deadly aim, and Sim's hands were above his head in a twinkling.

"Pull over to him," Josh said to his comrades, but never for an instant taking his eyes from the man.

"It's you, eh?" Sim cried savagely, and Josh fancied he meditated resistance.

"You know I've got good reason to shoot at the first show of trouble, an' I shall do it! A dead tory is worth three livin' ones."

"What's started you out on this game, eh? I've quit tryin' to even things for what you did at Bennington, an' am willin' to be friends."

"Don't be so foolish as to make a move?" Josh said in a warning tone, and to his comrades he added. "Pull up an' get his musket; then tow his craft ashore. I'll keep the advantage I've got, an' he won't live to play any trick while you're doin' the work."

A few more strokes of the oars and the bows of the boats touched, which brought Sim with his back to the captors.

Ned scrambled over the side, took possession of a musket and two pistols which were on the thwart just in front of the tory, and when he had passed them to Ben, Josh asked:

"Can't you find somethin' there that we can tie his hands with?"

"Won't the painter of the boat serve?"

“Yes; be quick about it, an’ don’t get between him an’ me while you’re doin’ it, for I don’t allow to take any chances.”

If Sim had known all that had occurred within the past few days it is more than probable he might not have submitted so quietly. He would have argued that it was better to fight against overwhelming odds than yield to be taken back to the American lines and there proven a spy.

He was in ignorance of the fact that the boys had been in General Lafayette’s camp, or knew he came from an interview with Cornwallis, therefore probably believed the worst that could befall him would be a vexatious detention.

“Lash him to the thwart!” Josh shouted. “We won’t take the chances of his jumpin’ overboard.”

“You must think I’m a fool! Who would be crazy enough to do sich a thing as that with his hands tied, eh?”

Josh waited until Ned had completed his task, and then said slowly:

“I should be that crazy, I reckon, rather than be taken to General Lafayette’s camp by three fellers what left you in Yorktown tryin’ to make a trade with Cornwallis.”

Sim started as if moved by an electric current.

“Who says I was there?” he cried savagely.

“I do. We left the place the same day you did; went down to sell fish, an’ happened to hear you talkin’ with a soldier,” and Josh, now his prisoner was helpless, seized one of the oars to row to the shore.

CHAPTER XV.

A TRIUMPHAL RETURN.

NED, after securing Sim in such a way that he could not so much as move from the thwart, grasped the stern of the other craft, and in this manner the tory and his boat were towed ashore.

When they were on the bank, Josh, in order to enjoy the meeting between the partners, removed the gag from Bart's mouth, and called Sim's attention to his friend.

"You must be a small part of a man to let these boys take you prisoner," Sim growled.

"I don't know as I'm very much worse off than you."

"I was in a boat, an' run on to them when I didn't s'pose there was a Yankee this side the camp."

"At the same time they've got you foul, an' I reckon there ain't much to choose between our situations."

"But you were ashore," Sim persisted, "and might have defended yourself."

"There's no use for you to quarrel as to which was the most careless," Josh interrupted. "We've

got the best of both, an' intend to hold the advantage a spell longer. Say, Ned, do you think it will pay to pull two boats back to camp?"

"It's going to be a hard job; but I'm afraid five people will be too big a load for one craft."

"That is my idea, but yet I don't fancy quite so much work. We'd better decide, an' start at once; you fellers have had sleep enough to last till the end of another day."

"We're all right," Ben replied quickly. "Take hold, an' we'll stow Mr. Hodgkins alongside his friend."

"Do you really mean to carry me back to the American camp?" Bart asked, as if surprised that such a course should be contemplated for a single instant.

"That is exactly what we count on doin'."

"But see here, Josh," and Sim spoke in the most friendly tone imaginable, "you don't want to do anything of the kind, eh? Let's figure this thing up, eh?"

"Go ahead; but I don't allow you'll make very much out of it."

"You can't earn a shillin' doin' this, an' I'll show you a chance to turn an honest penny, eh? You know that place of mine near Manchester, eh?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, turn us loose now, an' I'll make it over to you, eh? It's worth fifty pounds if it's worth a penny."

"You're too modest, Mr. Perkins," Josh replied

with a hearty laugh. "Do you know I set a higher price on *your* head alone?"

"Then give me the chance, an' keep Bart, eh? I don't know why I should try to get him out of the scrape; he's never been anythin' more'n a drawback to me. Untie these ropes, hand me my musket, an' the place is your'n, eh? You can keep the pistols to remember me by, eh?"

"I couldn't think of makin' sich a cheap trade, Mr. Perkins," Josh said with mock gravity. "You're worth a bigger price, an' I allow General Cornwallis would pay more for the news you counted on carryin' him."

"I'll give you half I get from him, eh?"

Josh shook his head.

"You shall have a hundred pounds; but you must go to the English lines before I can get it."

"We've kinder 'greed among ourselves that it wouldn't be good for our health to strike that place ag'in till we go with the Continental army. See here, Sim Perkins," and Josh's tone changed very suddenly, "there isn't any use in makin' this talk. I only gave you the chance to see how high you valued your neck. We're bound to carry you to the American lines, an' that settles it."

For the first time since his capture Sim displayed signs of fear. Until this moment he probably believed it would be a simple matter to coax the boys into releasing him; but now he began to doubt.

"I'll give you twice as much as you'll get from the Yankees, an' you can keep Bart, eh?"

“We count on keepin’ both of you. Come on, boys, let’s pack up Mr. Hodgkins.”

Ned assisted in the transportation of Bart, who was not able to walk owing to the many wrappings of cord, and when he had been laid in the bottom of the boat, Josh began to devise more secure bonds for Sim.

“We’ll truss him up same’s his partner, an’ stow ’em ’longside of each other,” he said, as he began overhauling the remainder of the fishing-lines.

“You don’t understand what it is to make an enemy of me!” Sim cried, now so angry as to omit the usual termination of his sentences. “I’ll hunt you to the death for this job, an’ when I say a thing I mean it.”

“Yes, we know all that, an’ yet we’re goin’ to take the chances. Pull him ’round a bit, Ned, so’s I can get his legs together.”

Sim struck out viciously with both feet, but Josh was prepared for just such an exhibition, and deftly avoided the kick.

“I’ll thump you over the head with an oar if you try anything like that again!” he cried, and the prisoner understood that the threat would be carried into execution without hesitation.

From that moment he remained passive, and the boys soon had him in as helpless a condition as was Bart.

This done, both men were placed in the bottom of Sim’s boat, and there tied to the thwarts lest they should contrive to roll out, for Josh feared one or

both might attempt to commit suicide rather than be taken where they would probably be condemned as spies.

“We’ll tow the boat with them in it,” Master Higgins said when his arrangements were completed. “It’s goin’ to be a precious hard job, but I don’t see any other way out of it.”

The remnant of Bart’s store of provisions was placed in the boys’ craft, together with the weapons, which now numbered two muskets and as many revolvers.

Nothing more remained to be done, and the journey was resumed without delay, Sim cursing and threatening until Josh warned him that he would be gagged unless the noise was stopped.

“We’ll shift places every half hour,” Master Higgins suggested when they were well under way. “’Cordin’ to my way of thinkin’ we don’t want to make another halt this side of the American lines, an’ it won’t pay to work too long at a time.”

“After having accomplished so much it doesn’t seem as if I should ever feel tired,” Ned replied. “Just fancy what we’ve done since leaving Dobbs Ferry!”

“It’s been a clear case of luck all through.”

“That’s not right, Josh, and you know it. It is due to good planning and caution, for all of which you are responsible. I’m sorry I made a kick against halting last night; but I was tired——”

“Don’t say anything about it. We stopped, an’ that settles the whole thing.”

“Yes, we stopped because you insisted on it. If you had agreed to do as we thought best, Sim might have slipped past us, for the sound of our oars would have warned him to keep out of sight.”

“It’s enough for me that we’ve got him snug an’ sound,” Josh replied, looking at the helpless prisoners with an air of satisfaction.

“It won’t be enough for *me* until every one knows that all the credit belongs to you.”

“But I won’t allow anything of the kind,” and now Josh spoke sharply. “What’s done, has been done by all, an’ no feller is to have more credit than another. You an’ Ben turned a little rusty last night, but that don’t cut any figger now. You wanted to prevent Sim from reachin’ the English camp as bad as I did, only you was mistaken as to how it was to be done.”

Ned did not continue the conversation, but in his own mind he was resolved that Josh should receive all the praise to which he was entitled, when they were among their friends.

During the remainder of the night, and until late in the afternoon of the next day, the boys worked with a will.

Two halts were made, one in the morning and another at noon, that food might be cooked, and then, the provisions having been consumed, there was, as Josh said grimly, “nothin’ more to hinder” the progress.

The prisoners remained comparatively silent. Several times they conversed together in low tones,

and on each of these occasions Josh made a careful examination of the ropes which confined them, fearing lest they had discovered some opportunity for escape.

The sun was hanging low in the heavens when, while they believed themselves yet a long distance from the American camp, they were hailed by a picket hidden among the trees.

“Who goes there?” he cried, and his voice sounded as sweetest music to the weary boys’ ears.

“Are we inside the American lines?” Josh asked, rising to his feet in the excitement of the moment.

“I reckon you’re mighty close to ’em. Are you the boys who come from New Hampshire?”

“The same ones? Where shall we land?”

“’Bout half a mile up the river will be the best place. I was stationed here to let ’em know when you got along, but we didn’t count on seein’ you for quite a spell yet,” and as he ceased speaking the picket discharged two pistols in rapid succession.

“What’s that for?” Josh asked, startled by the reports.

“To let ’em know you’ve hove in sight. It was Colonel Stewart’s orders.

Josh resumed his work at the oars, and Ben said in a tone so low that it could not be overheard by the sentinel:

“It looks as if they was goin’ to receive us in great shape.”

“There’s good reason why they should, as will soon be known,” Ned replied.

“Say, what are you towin’?” the man on shore cried curiously.

“A couple of friends what we’ve invited to stop with us a spell.”

“Look here, ain’t one of ’em the same man what left our camp yesterday?”

“I reckon he is.”

“There’s no reason to keep him in that shape. The general sent him on business, an’ trouble may grow out of sich a job.”

“That part of it is all right,” Josh cried cheerily. “We’re bringin’ him back ’cause he forgot part of his errand.”

The soldier looked perplexed; but by this time the boats were so far from him that a conversation could not well be prolonged, and Josh said with a chuckle of satisfaction:

“There’ll be more’n him surprised at seein’ Sim come back in this shape. He’s a good one, to fool all hands after we’d warned Colonel Stewart ’bout him.”

“I don’t believe we told the story as strongly as we should have done,” Ned suggested. “We thought it wouldn’t be possible for him to get here very soon, and failed to explain the whole matter.”

“I reckon you’re right. After we’d been most scared to death, I didn’t give any big amount of thought to Sim, for a fact, an’ if I hadn’t heard his tender voice at Yorktown, should have said for certain he couldn’t be this side of New York. Say, if

they're ever goin' to let us 'list, I allow this is the time when it should be done, eh?"

"There'll be no trouble about it now," Ben said with a laugh, "an' I reckon *your* uniform will be covered with gold lace."

"Soldiers don't wear that kind of flummery, no matter what they've done," Josh said quickly, and the words had hardly been spoken when a hail from the shore a short distance above told that the long journey had finally come to an end.

Colonel Stewart, accompanied by a small squad of soldiers, was on the bank, and his hearty greeting gave proof of what the boys might expect when they arrived at the camp.

"Did you finish your business?" he asked anxiously, and Josh replied joyously:

"Plum to the handle, an' a little more."

"Pull in here; this is the best place to land."

Not until the boat's bow grated on the sand did Colonel Stewart observe the occupants of the second craft, and he asked quickly, a frown coming over his face:

"What have you been doing? You had no right to take prisoners in this fashion."

"I reckon you'll think so when we introduce 'em," Josh said with a grin as he used an oar to designate the men. "This feller is Mr. Sim Perkins, the one we told you about. I heard him in General Cornwallis' camp braggin' that he could sneak up here an' get all the information he wanted. I reckon he did it too, an' if we hadn't invited him

to come with us, the Britishers would know by this time all that's goin' on."

"Do you mean to say he was in the English camp when you arrived?" the colonel asked in surprise.

"He was for a fact."

"It's a lie!" Sim cried. "I was on my way there, as you know, sir, when these young cubs caught me foul."

"That's all right, my dear Mr. Perkins," Josh said with a laugh. "There'll be plenty of men here pretty soon who know you 'most as well as I do, so there's no call to get excited."

"Who is the other prisoner?"

"Mr. Bart Hodgkins, Sim's pardner, an' the feller what we shot one day when they tried to stop us. He's marked, so you won't have to bother 'bout findin' folks what know *him*."

Colonel Stewart gazed at each of the boys in turn, and then said feelingly :

"If there has been no mistake made in this matter, you have rendered us such a service as it will be hard to repay."

"There *can* be no mistake, sir," Ned said earnestly. "We have had good reason to know them both. Sim may claim to be innocent ; but we can all swear that he is the man who gave us so much trouble—the one whom we were instructed to warn you against. I hope you will see that he does not have an opportunity to escape, and when the troops from New York arrive there will be but little difficulty in identifying him."

“There is no cause to doubt your words, my brave boys. It is only natural I should be surprised at learning we have had a spy among us who succeeded in gaining the confidence of all. I will answer for his safety.”

A few words spoken to a squad of soldiers, and the tories were provided with an ample escort.

“Look out for Sim!” Josh shouted as the men marched toward the camp with the prisoners in their midst. “He’s slippery as an eel, an’ you’d best shoot mighty straight in case he tries to run!”

“Now we will go to headquarters,” Colonel Stewart said. “I wanted to be the first to see you, for I have reproached myself with having been instrumental in sending boys on such a dangerous mission that men might well be pardoned for being afraid to attempt it.”

“It didn’t turn out very bad,” Josh replied carelessly. “We jest went there, found out all we wanted to know in short order, an’ come back, that’s all.”

Now was the time when Ned could keep the promise made to himself, and, despite Josh’s attempts to prevent him, he told the story of their journey.

“He is the one who did it all, sir. We have been with him, but if he had listened to us Sim would now be at the English camp telling General Cornwallis that General Washington is coming this way.”

“I didn’t do more’n the others did.”

“You boys are as generous as you are brave, and I shall insist that each receive equal credit for the work.”

“I reckon you mean that we can enlist?” and Josh looked up with a smile.

“You shall join the army, my boy, and that will not be sufficient reward for your services. I fancy I know what General Lafayette intends to do, but shall give no clue to my suspicions. I don’t think, however, that either will ever have cause to regret that he risked his life.”

“Capturin’ Sim was ’most enough to pay us, even if we’d done harder work; but I can’t let up on the agreement that I’m to be a soldier.”

“I should be very sorry if you had changed your mind in that respect. Here is my tent; go in and get something to eat while I report your arrival to the general.”

Colonel Stewart hurried away after the boys acted upon the suggestion, and for the second time in his life Josh sat down to a meal such as caused him surprise, both because of quantity and variety.

The old negro seemed almost bursting with importance as he waited upon the three who had proven their claim to be called heroes, and Josh privately informed Ned that it would be possible for him to eat considerably more if there wasn’t “so much fuss an’ feathers ’bout gettin’ at it.”

“I ’spects you gen’lemen hab done gone seen a right smart lot ob trabbelin’ sence you was hyar, sah?” the old darky began, evidently for the

purpose of learning what the boys had done since their departure.

"You're right," Ned replied with a laugh. "It's been more traveling than eating; but we seem to be in a fair way to settle the difference."

"Marse Stewart done tole me I was ter mak' a feas' for you gen'lemen, if you ever cum back, an' I jes' did my bes', sah."

"But how did you cook it so quickly? This food seemed to be ready when we came in."

"So it was, honey, so it was. When Marse Stewart done heard de signal, he yelled to me, an' started fur de shore. Den I went ter wuk, an' when a sperience cook gits down to wuk, sah, it ain't long 'fore de job am completed. I spect, sah, you'se done completed *your* job, sah?"

"Yes, I fancy we have, and after we tell the story at headquarters you shall hear it all."

"I'se gwine ter be pow'fully obligated, sah, when I'se tole erbout it."

The entrance of Colonel Stewart put an end to the conversation, and the old darky redoubled his efforts in attending upon the guests lest his master should discover that he had been asking questions.

"The general is ready and eager to see you when your hunger has been satisfied," he said, seating himself on a saddle as if to wait the pleasure of the feasters.

"We won't stop here any longer," and Ned rose hurriedly. "We can eat some other time."

"Finish the meal," the colonel commanded in a

pleasant tone. "There is no necessity of such haste, and you are entitled to all the comfort we can give you."

The boys reseated themselves, but their appetites had fled with the announcement that the general was ready to receive them.

"I've been makin' a pig of myself for the last five minutes, an' it's time I stopped," Josh finally said. "We haven't been on sich short allowance that we've got to be filled up like this."

"When did you have your last meal?"

"This morning. When we found Bart he had a big supply on hand, an' we didn't allow it should go to waste."

"Living off the enemy, eh?"

"Somethin' like that, only we had to feed the enemy at the same time, an' it was quite a job to do that while they could only hold their mouths open. I reckon we'd better wash up a little before we see the general?"

"Go just as you are; the stains of travel tell a story such as a soldier is always ready and pleased to hear. Your reception will be more cordial than it could ever be if you relied only on outward appearances to gain favor. Now we will go, and I promise you shall soon be allowed to rest."

When the boys followed Colonel Stewart out of the tent they learned that it might not be an easy task to reach the general's headquarters.

The soldiers had a very good idea of where the young messengers were going, when they left the

camp previously, and had now gathered to show their appreciation of the work performed.

A mighty shout went up as they emerged, and during several moments it was absolutely impossible for Colonel Stewart to force his way through the throng.

He was obliged to appeal to them for assistance before he could move a dozen feet from his tent.

“I am glad you wish to show your gratitude to these brave lads,” he said, shouting at the full strength of his lungs in order that the words could be heard above the tumult; “but just at this moment your greetings are ill-timed. The general is waiting to receive his messengers, and you must not detain them. There will be ample opportunity to learn the result of their mission, at a later hour, when they are at liberty.”

At this mild reproof the soldiers fell back, and the boys were allowed to proceed.

“Talk 'bout luck!” Josh whispered to Ned. “What else can it be when a crowd of soldiers are willin' to hurrah for me?”

“It's more than luck, Josh, it's pluck, and that is why they are so eager to congratulate you.”

CHAPTER XVI.

LIEUTENANT HIGGINS.

WHEN the young messengers were ushered into General Lafayette's tent, they found him surrounded by his staff, every man of whom gave evidence of his desire to learn what had been accomplished.

"My friends have returned," the young general said as he advanced to grasp and press warmly the hand of each. "It was a dangerous journey you undertook, and more that once I regretted that a soldier had not been sent in your stead. Now I am pleased no change was made in the plan, otherwise my lord Cornwallis would have full particulars of the movement which we wish should be kept a secret as long as possible."

The generous reception by the soldiers had served to confuse the boys slightly, and this cordial greeting caused them to lose all presence of mind. They stood silent and motionless, glancing alternately from the general to each other, until Josh said awkwardly :

"If you're half as glad to see us as we are to get back, you must be havin' a mighty good time."

“So I am, lieutenant,” was the laughing reply. “Perhaps you may never know how joyful I feel at this moment.”

Josh turned to learn who had been addressed by the title of lieutenant, and then noting that the general’s eyes were fixed on him, concluded some mistake had been made.

“We’re ’bout as glad as they make ’em,” he added, and then motioned for his comrades to say something, an act which caused great amusement to all the officers.

“If you can now tell us the story of your journey, lieutenant, we are ready to hear it,” Lafayette said, emphasizing the title.

Again Josh looked around in astonishment. This time he was certain the word “lieutenant” had been addressed to him, and he wondered greatly that one who commanded an army should be so ignorant concerning the position of a boy who had not yet been allowed even to enlist.

“I thought you knew I wasn’t a soldier,” he said earnestly. “Don’t you remember that you was to let us ’list if we went to Yorktown?”

“I remember perfectly.”

“Then of course I ain’t a lieutenant before I’ve been a soldier.”

“Permit me to contradict you. I have requested of Lieutenant-general, the Count de Rochambeau, three commissions in the French wing of the army, and you are lieutenants, even though you have not enlisted. I have no question but that General

Washington will be very happy to give you a corresponding rank in his forces, if you should decide not to remain with my king."

Never were three boys more completely mystified than those who now stood before General Lafayette, observed keenly by all present.

Ned advanced a pace as if about to speak, and then retreated to Colonel Stewart's side.

Ben looked from one to the other with incredulity written on every feature of his face, and Josh stared at the general several seconds, after which he said with emphasis :

"I reckon that soldier what promised to give me points will have his hands full for the next two or three days."

"We are impatient to hear your story," the general said.

"You'd better tell it, Ned," Josh whispered.

Ned looked at Ben as if to say he should act as spokesman, but the latter declined the honor with a very decided gesture, and he began :

"I can only give you an account of what we did up to the time of landing. Then it was Josh who performed the mission, and he is entitled to all the credit of preventing Sim Perkins from returning to the English camp."

Then, with due regard to every detail, but careful not to prolong the story beyond reasonable limits, Ned gave an entertaining account of their movements until the arrival at Yorktown.

This done, he glanced at Josh, and the latter con-

tinued the narrative, not only repeating what had been said to him by the soldier who acted as guard, but traced with a stick on the ground the relative position of each important redoubt.

In referring to the war vessels, he described their rig so exactly that the listeners understood to what class they belonged, and he concluded by telling what he had heard Sim say.

This done, he stopped, and Ned was about to describe the return journey, when Ben, with an unusual show of boldness, said :

“I'd like to tell the rest of the story, for I acted like a coward, and the general should know it before he makes me really a soldier.”

He was so partial to Josh as he related the incidents, and bore so hardly upon his own lack of courage, that his comrades interrupted him several times, and when he concluded General Lafayette said warmly :

“I shall never believe that a boy who makes such a confession as you have just made, and at the same time praises his comrades so heartily, can be a coward. You have been afraid, my friend, that is all. There are many times when the bravest are afraid, but the fact that they do their duty despite their fear, proves them heroes. There is no mistake as to the character of the man whom you captured after he left this camp?”

“Not the slightest, sir. Both Ben and I have seen him several times, and Josh knows him well. He lives between Manchester and Nashua; is a

tory, and has acted as a spy for General Clinton. He does not do this to assist the king, but simply to make money. When the other soldiers get here you will find plenty who know him."

"See to it that he is carefully guarded," Lafayette said to a captain who stood near. "We will hold him prisoner until the arrival of General Washington's army. I would not have these boys begin their military career by acting as witnesses when their evidence must condemn a man to death."

The captain left the tent, and the general said to the young lieutenants:

"You are in need of rest. Until other quarters can be provided, Colonel Stewart will receive you as his guests. To-morrow at dress parade you will report for duty to me personally."

He had half turned as if to signify that the interview was at an end, when Josh cried eagerly:

"See here, general! There ain't any mistake 'bout our really bein' soldiers?"

"You have the rank of lieutenants, in the service of his most gracious majesty, my king, Louis XVI. You are on detached duty under my command, and I doubt not will have good opportunity to give yet further proofs of bravery and a love for your country."

The general turned again to the members of his staff, and Colonel Stewart beckoned the boys to follow him from the tent.

Just outside he halted to say:

"Go to my quarters, and make yourselves at

home. I shall see you again later, but now I must remain here to discuss the news you have brought. I salute you, lieutenant," he added laughingly as he bowed to Josh.

"That's jest the tronble," Master Higgins said in a comical tone, "I'm afraid all of you think that's a good joke, an' it won't 'mount to anything more."

"You heard what the general said," and now Colonel Stewart spoke seriously. "Gentlemen do not play such jokes. You are as positively lieutenants, as I am a colonel."

With this he left the boys to find their way to his tent as best they could, and when they were thus comparatively alone, Josh cried:

"Talk 'bout luck! It wasn't pluck that made us lieutenants!"

"What was it?"

"General Lafayette."

"But it was because you had pluck, and nothing else. Ben and I are the ones who should believe in luck, because we have jumped into the army with commissions before we knew how to handle a musket, on your reputation."

"See here, Ned," Josh said gravely, "I don't want to hear you say anything like that again; it ain't fair. What one did, all did, an' I ask you honestly not to keep puffin' me up this way."

"Very well, lieutenant, your orders shall be obeyed."

"Much obliged, Lieutenant Allen," and Josh did his best at giving a military salute. "Do you

think I look much like an officer in this rig? Say, I reckon we shall have to wear uniforms?"

"Of course."

"An' I've been told officers have to buy all their clothes themselves."

"Father did," Ben replied.

"Well," and Josh surveyed his tattered garments, "'less I can sell that mule I'll come out mighty slim on some of the fixin's."

"You'll be no worse off than I," Ned said with a look of perplexity. "We're about even in the way of money, and I don't see what can be done."

"Father will rig up some kind of a plan when he comes," Ben said positively. "Don't you think we'd better turn in? It's nearly dark, and I feel as if I hadn't had a good night's sleep for a month."

Before any reply could be made to this proposition a party of soldiers espied the boys, and it was no longer possible for them to do as they wished.

The old veteran who had volunteered to give them military instruction was among the number, and his first remark showed that the honor bestowed upon them by the general had not been kept a secret from the men.

"Well, my French bantams, after hobnobbin' with Corney, a Colonial commission ain't big enough for you, eh? Goin' to serve Louis XVI. instead of the Continental Congress, I hear. Have you forgot how to talk the American langwidge?"

"What's growin' on you?" Josh cried. "Tryin' to back out of your bargain?"

“What bargain did I make?”

“You said you’d give us pints on bein’ soldiers.”

“So I could; but when it comes to lootenants, they’re too high up for me. Troopers is what you oughter been, but the general had to spile three good ones by givin’ ’em commissions.”

At first Ned fancied the old fellow was jealous; but after a few moments it became apparent that this was simply a specimen of the veteran’s humor.

As if his having volunteered to teach them a soldier’s duties had given him a certain proprietorship in their honors, he took forcible possession of all three, ordering them here and there until they stood in the very center of the camp, where were congregated several hundred men.

“Here’s my lieutenants!” he shouted, “an’ if you cheap military ornaments will hold your tongues, they shall out with the whole story of how they bamboozled Corney. Go at it, lads, an’ give us as much of a yarn as you spun to the general.”

The boys knew from past experience that it would be useless to make any objections, and obeyed the veteran’s orders.

It seemed as if the men would never be satisfied with hearing what had been done, and even after the story was told with every unimportant detail, they continued to ask questions until a late hour in the evening, when the arrival of a strange horseman gave the curious ones fresh opportunity for speculation.

“Come away, boys,” Ben said when the greater

portion of their audience hastened off to learn who the stranger was. "Now's our chance, if we ever count on getting some sleep."

His comrades were more than willing to accompany him, and soon the three were in Colonel Stewart's tent, discussing with the old darky the possibility of sleeping there without inconveniencing the rightful occupant.

"I'se done figger it all out, lieuten't," he said gravely, and Josh asked sharply :

"What do you mean by that? Who told you I was a lieutenant?"

"Marse Stewart done gone said you'se gwine ter be oficers jes' as soon as de general could see yo'."

"It seems that everybody knew it before we did," Josh said with a grimace:

"Which simply proves that it must be true, and we had no reason to doubt it. When the general gave you that title, I suspected a commission went with it; but never for a moment dreamed Ben and I would be included. Whether I'm a lieutenant, a spy, or no more of a soldier than I was when we left home, I'm precious tired, and shall be glad when our beds are ready."

"Am you gwine ter hab jes' a bite to eat, sah?"

"I reckon we can get along without any more food until morning. I ate so much dinner that it seems as if I never could be hungry again."

The old darky spread out a few bundles of straw, thus making a bed sufficiently wide for all three, and in less than five minutes from the time they laid down, the young officers were sleeping soundly.

Two hours later they were awakened by a conversation at the entrance of the tent.

Some one had asked the old servant a question, and Ben heard only the reply :

“ De lieuten'ts am hyar, sah ; but de lieuten'ts hab done gone to bed, sah.”

“ Say to Lieutenant Jaffreys that Lieutenant Jaffreys would like to see him.”

“ It's father !” Ben cried joyfully as he sprang to his feet and ran out.

Josh and Ned heard the greetings between father and son, and then the visitor was ushered into the tent.

“ You boys have been making rapid strides in the army since you left Dobbs Ferry,” Ben's father said cheerily as he gave each a hearty handshake. “ I'm not certain but that all outrank me, since your commissions are from the French king, and I am only an officer in a rebel army. You couldn't wait until Colonel Scammell kept his promise ?”

“ We hadn't the time,” Josh replied. “ General Lafayette wanted us to do a little job, an' when it was finished all three of us had blossomed out as lieutenants.”

“ Yes, I heard the particulars of that ‘ little job,’ and am proud my son should have been one of the messengers.”

“ We ain't cuttin' any very great figger at bein' officers yet, sir,” Josh continued. “ I wonder if lieutenants ever ride mules ?”

“ That can be settled to-morrow morning, when I

understand you will appear in all the magnificence to which your rank entitles you."

"What do you mean by that?" Ben asked in perplexity.

"I should have held my tongue, for it is to be kept a secret until to-morrow. I am exceedingly fortunate in having arrived just as I did, however."

This remark served to remind the boys that as yet they did not know the reason for Lieutenant Jaffreys' appearance, so unexpected, and Ned asked :

"Is it possible the Continental army has arrived, sir?"

"It is on the way, but can hardly be very near. I came in advance with despatches for General Lafayette, riding sixty miles or more each day, by changing horses often."

"When did the army start?"

"It left Dobbs Ferry on the 18th of August, and crossed the Hudson River the following night. More than that I cannot tell you, for I began my journey before all the force had gotten over."

"And are they to come here?"

"I think not. Unless I am mistaken this wing of the army will change its quarters very soon."

"Where will it go?" Ben asked.

"You must learn, my boy, that a good soldier is never inquisitive. It is sufficient for him to wait patiently until orders are given, and then do his best to execute them."

“I’m willing enough to wait,” Ben said laughingly. “All of us want a little rest, for we have been kept moving pretty lively since we saw you last. Did you know we captured a spy?”

“Colonel Stewart told me. If that man had succeeded in carrying his information to General Cornwallis, it would probably have cost us a great deal of blood at a time when we have not over much to spare.”

Again Ben insisted on giving to Josh all the credit, and this time Lieutenant Higgins lost his patience entirely.

“I won’t have you sayin’ sich things, Ben! I mean this for Ned as well. I’m tired hearin’ that yarn when it ain’t true, an’ now it must stop.”

It was evident Josh meant exactly what he said, and from that moment his comrades ceased to annoy him with too much praise.

If Ben’s father had waited until the boys finished asking questions, he might have remained all night, for they were eager to hear everything he was willing to tell. He soon put an end to the visit by leaving the tent in search of his own quarters, and once more the young officers were at liberty to enjoy the repose which had been so well earned.

When Josh awakened on the following morning he found lying beside him a uniform, complete even to the sword, and while gazing at it in bewilderment, observed that his comrades had been equally fortunate.

“Look here, fellers!” he cried excitedly. “What

do you think of this? Who do you s'pose give us these, an' where do you s'pose they came from?"

It was some time before either Ben or Ned could so much as speculate upon the matter, so bewildered by the finery were they, and no satisfactory conclusion had been arrived at when Colonel Stewart awakened.

"Now I fancy you will believe that you are really soldiers, eh?"

"Did the general give us these things?" Josh asked.

"They were procured through his influence. Several of the officers had a hand in the matter. It was not such an easy task to get three complete uniforms here, but by levying contributions from those so fortunate as to have duplicate garments, we contrived to fit you out decently well. Put the clothes on; I am curious to learn how nearly they will fit."

Not many minutes were required for Josh to don such garments as he had never before fancied it would be possible for him to wear, and, in his eyes at least, there were no imperfections in them.

The colonel, however, noted several points about the uniform which might have been improved upon by a tailor, but on the whole the appearance of the boys was very creditable.

"It's come at last!" Josh said as he strode triumphantly to and fro in the tent, with his sword dangling by his side.

"What do you mean?" Colonel Stewart asked in surprise.

“Why, I’m a soldier. I’ve figgered on bein’ one ever since I could remember, but I never thought I’d have a sword——”

Josh ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant the glittering weapon, catching between his legs, threw him headlong.

“It’s lucky I wasn’t outside where that old soldier could see me,” he cried, rising to his feet as he rubbed tenderly the end of his nose which was the first portion of his body to strike the ground. “Even if I *am* a lieutenant, I ain’t much of a soldier if I can’t walk.”

“That, my boy, is something I hope you will keep ever in mind. It was possible for the general to give you a commission, but he could not make of you a soldier. *You* must learn the lesson, and it will be very much more difficult than if you had risen from the ranks. You are to go on duty this forenoon, and I’m afraid will make a sad mess of it.”

“There’s an old soldier in camp who promised to give me points if I ever got a chance to enlist.”

“Then send for him at once. He may be rough in his teaching, but a few harsh words will do you more good than harm.”

“I don’t know his name, but it wouldn’t be hard work to find him.”

“Take off your sword, and begin the search; you will have plenty of time before breakfast is ready.”

Josh obeyed, and was so fortunate in his quest

that he returned ten minutes later, followed by the old veteran who had regretted that three good troopers were spoiled when the young messengers were given commissions.

"I thought it was you, Jepson, who promised to put the boys through their paces, and I hope you will make a good job of it," Colonel Stewart said as the soldier entered. "I will see that you are relieved of all other duty while we are in camp, and no time is to be lost. Have you had breakfast?"

"No, sir."

"You will eat with the boys; I shall take mine at headquarters."

"Is it 'cordin' to tactics, sir, that a private can give orders to a bloomin' lootenant?"

"In this case, Jepson, there are three who must dance to your piping until they know something of a soldier's duties," the colonel replied laughingly as he left the tent.

"You heard that, did you?" the veteran asked eagerly when he was alone with his pupils.

"Yes."

"Well then, act accordin'ly. I'm here to put you through your paces; it's the first time I've ever had a right good chance at a commissioned officer, an' I'm goin' to make the most of it. Lootenant Higgins!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Stow all that, you bloomin' greeny. When I sings out, you're to look on me as a superior officer, an' touch your cap like this," and Jepson gave

the military salute. "Don't bring your finger up like you wanted to knock yer head off, but do it gracefully, same's I did," he added when Josh attempted, with very poor success, to imitate the movement. "Go on, all hands, an' I'll sit here a smokin' of my pipe while you lootenants keep on a salutin' of me."

CHAPTER XVII.

WILLIAMSBURG.

JEPSON enjoyed himself thoroughly during the two hours devoted to the first lesson in military etiquette, but it is safe to say the boys did not have a particularly jolly time.

All three realized how important it was they should learn as much as was possible before reporting for duty, and no teacher ever had more studious pupils.

Jepson insisted on representing, first General Lafayette, and then some officer lower in rank exacting the most scrupulous deference to his assumed position, and obliging the boys to advance, take leave, or salute, until, as Josh said, "it was harder work tryin' to be a lieutenant than a whole company of soldiers."

An appetizing breakfast was prepared, and Ben's father, one of the guests who had arrived shortly before the meal was served, seemed to find as much enjoyment in the lesson as did Jepson.

"I'm gettin' more outer these 'ere lootenants than I ever shall ag'in," the old soldier said in an aside to Ben's father, "an' I'm bound to make the

most of it. This day week they'll be bossin' me 'round in great style."

"I fancy they won't forget how to salute, at all events," was the laughing reply.

"I don't intend they shall, an' after dress parade I'm countin' on puttin' 'em through the manual of arms; they'll earn their swords this day, I'll venter to say."

"They can stand a good bit of work, so don't spare them."

"I don't intend to," the old soldier replied grimly as he sent Josh outside, "to see if he could come in without tumblin' all over hisself an' his sword."

Never a word of complaint did the young officers utter, however sarcastic Jepson was in his criticisms, until Colonel Stewart returned and asked how they were getting along.

"I can't say rightly, sir," Josh replied as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "It seems like as if the boss here had some kind of a grudge ag'in lieutenants, an' was workin' it out on us."

"You need disciplinin', you bloomin' bungler, that's what you need," Jepson cried.

"Well, I'm gettin' it, ain't I? 'Cordin' to my way of thinkin' there won't be anythin' of that kind lackin' when you get through."

Until the hour when they were to report for duty, the boys were not allowed a moment's respite, and then Jepson went to his quarters, after assuring Ben's father that he would continue the task as soon as "parade was over."

Thanks to their teacher, the boys made quite a soldierly appearance, in view of the fact that they were exceedingly green in the business, when they presented themselves before the commander of the forces.

General Lafayette received them with a kindly smile; but had no time for any particular attentions. The parade was hastened as much as possible, and at its close an announcement made that the army would break camp on the following morning.

Every one understood a demonstration would be made against General Cornwallis' forces as soon as the main army arrived, and all knew by this movement that they were to take up a position for the struggle.

Therefore it was that both officers and men were in the highest spirits. They had dodged the English army so long, it was a positive relief to know a decisive battle would be fought, even though, at that time, it seemed as if the odds were against them.

"Do you know where we are going, father?" Ben asked as they were returning to Colonel Stewart's quarters to meet Jepson again.

"In the vicinity of Williamsburg. It is there the armies are to be united, and then I fancy the word will be, 'On to Yorktown!'"

"Suppose the British should prove too much for us?"

"We mustn't suppose anything of the kind. Every man should feel certain we will conquer."

“But in case we don’t?” Ben persisted.

“Then the fate of the colonies is decided. A positive defeat at Yorktown, and the American forces will be virtually wiped out, therefore every man must do more than his duty when the final struggle comes.”

“What will be the result if we are victorious?”

“The English will be driven from the south, and the long fight for liberty very near a successful close.”

Jepson was so excited by the prospect of a decisive battle that he might not have continued his instructions but for Colonel Stewart’s positive orders.

“It is more necessary than you believed this morning that the boys get a smattering of their new profession,” he said when the old soldier proposed that the lesson be postponed. “You can make your preparations for the march in half an hour, and there is no reason why they should not be put through the manual of arms.”

That day’s work was as hard as any Josh remembered of having done. Hoeing corn in July was as child’s play compared with it, and before their instructor would allow them a “breathing-spell,” it seemed impossible to do so much as hold the muskets.

When they were dismissed for an hour, that they might get dinner, the young lieutenants went to pay the first visit to their horses since the return from Yorktown.

The animals had been well cared for by some of the officers' servants, and Josh was so much pleased with the appearance of the mule that he no longer had any desire to exchange her for a horse.

"If she ain't afraid of my sword, I reckon she'll do first rate for a green lieutenant," he said after examining the animal as critically as if he had never seen her before. It's a pity her ears are quite so long, an' I wish she had more of a tail, but ridin' her will beat walkin' all hollow."

"I reckon Sim would be only too glad to be on her back this minute," Ned said, and thus reminded of the tory, added: "Has any one heard from him to-day?"

"I've been so busy I'd almost forgotten he was in camp," Josh replied. "I heard Lieutenant Jafreys talkin' about him with Ben."

"Father said he wouldn't be tried until the main army arrived."

"Then he'll go to Williamsburg with us."

"I reckon he will, unless somebody gets careless an' he has a chance to escape. I believe it was our business to keep watch over him."

"Josh thinks no one but he can attend to such work," Ben said with a smile. "I suppose he'll be hung, an' can't help wishing we hadn't been the ones to capture him."

"Now don't get soft-hearted," and Ned took his friend's arm. "This is war, and we shall see better men than he ever dared to be, killed by the hundreds."

“A death in action is nothing compared with hanging.”

“Don’t think of it any more,” Josh said as he turned to leave the stabling-ground. “We’ve got all on our minds we can take care of.”

The entire afternoon was spent with Jepson, and when the boys laid down to sleep they were really in need of rest.

Next morning the young officers were aroused before daybreak, and the sun was just rising when they rode out of camp in company with members of the general’s staff.

During the eight days’ march they had ample time and opportunity to become acquainted with the more simple duties which would be required of them.

If a messenger was to be sent to the rear, one of the boys found himself called upon for the work, and while the troops were in motion they were seldom at liberty to ride together in idleness.

They messed with the men of Colonel Stewart’s regiment, and however tired they felt when the troops halted for the night, there was no shirking the labor required of them by Jepson.

“This march is jest what you bloomin’ lootenants needed to break you in,” the old soldier said on one occasion when Ben insisted it was impossible for him to pay attention to the lesson, owing to his extreme weariness. “Gettin’ tired is somethin’ that’s never allowed a soldier, an’ you’re bound to set an example to the men. If you officers give in, how

are the privates to keep up to their work? What you want jest now is a forced march of about fifteen miles, wound up with an engagement what would keep you busy the rest of the day, with say a flesh-wound or two, to show what soft times we soldiers have.”

Ben never allowed himself to complain from that moment.

Josh had accepted in silence the laborious duties required of him, as a form of payment for his commission, and no one ever heard him acknowledge he was tired.

Then came the reward, in the shape of a long rest at Williamsburg.

The boys were provided with a tent, and since their finances were not in such a condition as admitted of the luxury of a servant, Josh acted the part of cook.

From this day, the 7th of September, until noon of the 14th, the boys passed the time in a monotonous fashion.

No camp duties were required of them, save to be present at dress-parade, and the remaining hours of wakefulness were spent in acquiring knowledge of their new profession, with Ben's father, Colonel Stewart, or old Jepson acting as instructor.

Then came the stirring information that General Washington and the Count de Rochambeau were within a few miles of the camp, they having left the troops at Elk River, that the commander-in-chief might spend a short time at Mount Vernon. It had

been six years since the leader of the American forces visited his home, and even on this occasion he only allowed himself to remain three days.

Instantly the cheering news had been brought, the entire camp was in commotion; all the troops were ordered out to receive the chief, and when General Washington appeared, a salute of twenty-one guns was fired.

The three "green" lieutenants had the best possible opportunity of seeing the man who was sacrificing so much for his country, and from whom so much was yet expected. They were in attendance upon General Lafayette, and consequently rode forward with him to meet the one man above all others whom they desired to see.

As a matter of course, the youngsters were of but little importance during the ceremony, but they succeeded in saluting the general in a manner which won for them the praise of Jepson.

"I couldn't have done it better myself," he said when, after the troops were dismissed, he lounged into his pupils' tent to smoke his pipe, and "put 'em through a few of their paces." "I have great hopes you'll 'mount to somethin' yet, pervidin' I'm left alive to keep you in place."

"Do you suppose there will be a battle soon?" Josh asked eagerly, believing now General Washington had arrived the fighting would begin immediately.

"I'm thinkin' we'll have quite a spell of loafin' first. Too much, perhaps, seein's how the boys are

spilin' for a good fair whack at Corney. You see the army ain't here yet, and when it does come we shall most likely spend considerable time gettin' into position."

"But we're only twelve miles away."

"It'll be a closer berth than that afore you have a chance to show what can be done in the way of fightin'. There'll be a big time at headquarters to-night, so I'm told."

"What's goin' on?" Josh asked with mild curiosity.

"One of your Frenchmen, the Markiss St. Simon, is goin' to give a big spread to General Washington. It's a pity you lootenants ain't a bit higher in rank; you might get an invite."

"I reckon we can worry along with my kind of cookin', 'specially since you wouldn't have time to tell us how to act."

"I s'pose you think an old duffer like me can't carry sail at sich a spread? But that's where you're mistaken. I've been in more'n one of 'em, an' with General Washington not far away."

"Tell us about it?" and now Ned began to display curiosity.

"I reckon it'll keep till after we've had our scur-sion to Yorktown. Jest now you've got time for a little practice; I'm countin' on givin' you a bit of sword-play to liven things up."

The old man could not have proposed anything which would have been more acceptable to the boys. They were thoroughly tired of the manual of arms

as laid down for the musket, but this was a portion of their training all had been eager to begin.

At supper-time only a cold lunch was eaten, so interested were both instructor and pupils, and at eight o'clock in the evening all were intent upon the work, when the flap of the tent was pulled aside, displaying the gorgeous uniform of an aide-de-camp on General Lafayette's staff.

Prompted by Jepson, the boys returned his salute in true military fashion, and were then surprised almost to the verge of bewilderment by the message he delivered.

“Major-General, the Marquis de la Fayette presents his compliments, and desires that you young gentlemen will wait upon him at the tent of Major-General, the Marquis de St. Simon.”

The boys were so confused by this ceremonious command that had it not been for Jepson all three would have neglected to return the aide's parting salute, and when the flap of the tent once more hid from view the gorgeous apparel of the general's messenger, Josh exclaimed :

“Slingin' markisses 'round in this style is gettin' a little too fine for me; I'll have to jine the American part of the army so I can understand what's goin' on.”

“Are ye so dumb ye don't know the meanin' of all that, you bloomin' idjut?” Jepson roared.

“Well, it ain't hard to guess that General Lafayette's got some job on hand he wants done, an' so sends for three fellers from New Hampshire, instead

of lettin' it be bungled by the old soldiers what are layin' 'round camp thinkin' they know everythin'."

Jepson raised a sword to strike his saucy pupil, but Lieutenant Higgins had taken good care to be out of harm's way before making the remark.

"It's the greatest honor you duffers could have," the veteran cried excitedly. "Where's General Washington this very minute? In the Markiss St. Simon's tent, of course. An' why are ye bid to come there? So you'll be presented to the greatest man this country ever had or ever will have, of course. What a pity all this is kept for boys who can't tell the difference between thrust and parry, instead of bein' given to them what are of some benefit to the army."

"Meanin' you?" Josh added laughingly, and then he asked gravely. "Do you really believe we are to see General Washington?"

"There can't be any mistake 'bout it, an' you'd better get inter your uniforms as quick as you know how. Of course you oughter have a better rig for a dinner-party, but seein' you ain't been in the service long enough to walk without tumblin' over your own sword, I reckon they'll make allowances."

Although the old soldier never lost an opportunity to make sport, when they were alone, of his "raw recruits" as he often called the young lieutenants, he was ever ready to defend them against others, as was instanced when he quarreled with one of his comrades who dared to speak slightly of them in his presence.

He was secretly pleased that his *protégés* were to be thus honored, and watched with jealous eye their hurried preparations to obey the summons.

Three times did he force Josh to comb his hair, because it was not arranged exactly as he thought it should be, and after they announced that their toilets were complete, so far as it was in their power to make them so, he gravely inspected each in turn.

“I reckon you’ll do,” he said hesitatingly. “I’d liked it if you had better sashes, an’ finer swords, but it’ll have to go as it is, I s’pose.”

“What are we to do when we get there?” Josh asked anxiously.

“You’ve simply been ordered to report, that’s all, an’ how many times must I tell how that’s to be done?”

“I thought perhaps it would be necessary to go through with some different maneuvers because the commander-in-chief is there.”

“You’re on duty when you go, an’ all that’s called for is to report in proper manner. Did you think General Washington was goin’ to stand outside the tent waitin’ till you come up, so’s he could thank you for bringin’ in a scurvy spy what ain’t worth rope enough to hang him?”

“We didn’t think that, but I had an idea all hands of ’em might ask why you didn’t come too, an’ I wanted to know what we should say.”

As his only revenge for this remark Jepson exacted from his pupils a salute due a superior officer, and the boys made their way through the camp,

feeling woefully nervous regarding the coming ordeal, but happy beyond the power of words to express at the prospect of being spoken to by General Washington.

When the young lieutenants finally stood before the gay company which filled General St. Simon's tent, no one could have found a fault with their manner. It was hard to realize that in only ten days they were able to act so well the part of soldiers.

"These are the officers of whom I am very proud, my dear general," Lafayette said as the boys stood before him. "At present they are in the service of Louis XVI., but I hope soon to see them servants of the Continental Congress, with that portion of the army to which they belong by right of inclination."

"I am gratified at hearing such flattering reports of you, young gentlemen," Washington said with a gracious bow. "The marquis thinks it remarkable you should be such staunch patriots although so young, but I, knowing your countrymen so well, am not surprised. You are entitled to the reward promised by Colonel Scammell for acting as our messengers, and if you wish to claim it, present yourselves to him upon his arrival."

"They have proven their metal, and I would not wish to have them leave me, but that I know they will consider it a step higher in rank to receive an American commission," Lafayette said with a smile, and General Washington added :

"You have my sincere thanks, young gentlemen,

for your very valuable services; but have a care lest your heads be turned by too much praise. Do not be satisfied with looking back upon what you *have* done; strive constantly to advance, and believe me, the day will surely come when you are spoken of as having been among those who freed their country from burdensome chains."

A parting salute from General Lafayette, and the boys understood that the moment had come for departure.

Raising their hands as precisely as if Jepson was setting the example, the young lieutenants marched out of the tent with a deep sense of the honor bestowed upon them.

"How 'bout that?" Josh said, suddenly wheeling around when they were so far from the tent that his words could not be overheard. "How does that strike you, when a month ago I was loafin' 'round Manchester tryin' mighty hard for a chance to earn enough to keep me in grub? *Now* it seems I'm good enough to be thanked by General Washington himself! There ain't very many old soldiers who can say that much!"

"It strikes me your head is being turned by too much flattery, as the general suggested," Ned replied with a laugh. "I wouldn't be surprised if you refused to ride the mule after this."

"I don't reckon there's much danger of that ever happenin', considerin' I'd have to walk if it wasn't for her. So we're goin' into the light infantry under Colonel Scammell? There was a time when

I counted some on havin' a chance to enlist in that service; but I never dreamed of bein' an officer where there are so many brave men."

"It's a mighty big honor for all hands of us," Ned replied thoughtfully, and at that instant the young lieutenants were interrupted in their mutual congratulations by Jepson.

"Prouder'n turkey cocks, ain't yer?" he asked ironically. "Don't reckon ary one cares 'bout talkin' to a private after this, eh? I've been keepin' my eye on my raw recruits, an' could see how swelled up they was, comin' out like graven images 'cause the big bugs took a notion to see what they looked like."

"That's where you're makin' a mistake," Josh retorted. "We was sent to find you. Washington says he can't eat another mouthful till you come in an' give 'em a few pints on soldierin'."

"I don't say I couldn't do it," the old soldier replied with a hearty laugh, "but I'm all wore up tryin' to make somethin' out of three commissioned idjuts, an' ain't really got the time. Say, what happened over there, any way?"

Ned understood that the old man had been waiting for them in order to learn what the commander-in-chief had said, and he gave a detailed report of all that occurred while they were in the tent.

"He's a great soldier! A great soldier, an' is allers the same, no matter how tough we're gettin' it. I've seen him at Valley Forge; them was the days when a man showed what he had in him.

The only wonder to me is that he could waste his time on sich bloomin' idjuts as you three be. Now come along an' let me see how you walked inter the tent; I'll be the general for half an hour or so, till my pipe's smoked out, an' you won't get so much honey from me as he spread over you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SPY.

AFTER the arrival of General Washington it seemed to the boys as if each hour brought some exciting incident, all bearing upon the coming struggle which would probably decide the fate of the country.

The most important of these was the landing of five thousand French troops from Admiral de Grasse's fleet, and Jepson said in a tone of satisfaction when the number was made known:

"It begins to look like we'd got Corney in a trap, great soldier though he is, an' there's no mistake but that he's as good a commander as the Britishers can find."

"It seems to me enough Frenchman have landed to overpower the force at Yorktown without any help," Josh said in reply to the remark, although it was not addressed particularly to him.

"The allied army isn't any too strong for the work before 'em. The Britishers can fight under cover, an' all the shelter we'll have is sich as can be thrown up 'twixt now an' the beginnin' of the siege."

“Do you believe we shall get the best of the fight?”

“Of course I do. Show me the man in this camp what makes different kind of talk, an’ I’ll flog him, even if he’s twice my size.”

“The French fleet is a wonder,” Ned added. “I’m told that on twenty-four of the ships are nineteen hundred guns, and surely they ought to be a good offset for the fortifications of the British.”

“We’ve yet to see how much work they can do; but I don’t reckon we shall help things any by standin’ here figgerin’ on what’s comin’ in the way of a fight. It’s time you lootenants was put through your paces once more, for Colonel Stewart’s orders are to keep you hummin’ till I turn you over to Colonel Scammell.”

The notes of preparation everywhere around spurred the boys on in their acquirement of military knowledge, for all were eager to be considered soldiers when the battle opened, and save at such times as they were sleeping, caring for their horses, or engaged in work around the tent, every hour was spent with old Jepson.

On the 19th of September the veteran gave them their last lesson, for on the following day the main army arrived, and the young officers were presented to their commander.

“It seems that you have not only made yourselves soldiers since I saw you last, but earned commissions as well,” he said heartily, after they had repeated General Washington’s words. “I am glad

to have you with me. While on the march we got an inkling of what had been done by three boys from Portsmouth and I took no small portion of the credit to myself."

"But for you, sir, we should never have had an opportunity to come here," Ned replied.

"You can't consider that a favor on my part, since for the benefit of our country I sent you into great danger, although it seems it was but trifling as compared with what you have since undertaken. Now what shall I do for you? Are you capable of assuming command?"

"I do not think so, sir," and Ned spoke in a decided tone. "We have done our best to learn what a soldier's duties are, but I am certain we ought not to have a command given us."

"That's about the size of it," Josh added. "We're willin' to go in as privates, even if we have got commissions, but we mustn't be kept out of the row."

"There is little danger of that, my boy," and Colonel Scammell laughed heartily. "You shall see all the fighting you can possibly ask for; men are needed now if ever, even though our allies are coming forward so bravely. For the present you shall serve on my staff as aides. Have you kept possession of the horses?"

"We haven't lost anythin' since we started," Josh replied; "but my hoss is a mule."

"Providing it is a serviceable animal, you have no reason to be ashamed of the mount. See to it that

your tent is moved near mine, detail some man from the light infantry to do the work, and report to me in an hour."

"We have had as an instructor a veteran from Colonel Stewart's regiment. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to let him assist us in the work?"

"Ask the colonel's permission for the detail, and perhaps it would be well to keep him with you providing he is willing to make a change for the time being, and you have no objections to him as a tent-mate."

"Indeed we haven't," Josh cried. "He's jest the one we want."

"Then set about the work at once, and join me at headquarters in an hour."

The young officers had no difficulty in gaining permission for Jepson's detachment from Colonel Stewart's regiment, with the understanding that his wishes should first be consulted in the matter.

"Want me in the light infantry, eh?" the old fellow asked with a raising of the eyebrows when the boys made known their wishes. "I allow I might give some of 'em a few pints."

"But we don't expect you're goin' to straighten out the whole force. We thought you might like to be with us."

"So that's the way you put it, Lieutenant Higgins? You've got an idee the old man ain't told you all he knows yet, eh?"

"We thought you might be lonesome if you couldn't boss officers 'round, an' so cooked up this plan to keep you from bein' homesick."

“You’re gettin’ mighty thoughtful all of a sudden. Well, I’ll agree to the transfer, pervidin’ I’m put back with the Pennsylvanians when this scrimmage is over.”

“Then we’d better change our quarters at once,” Ned suggested. “We are to report to Colonel Stewart very soon, and it won’t look well if we’re late.”

“What’er you countin’ on doin’?” Jepson asked fiercely.

“Moving the tent and horses, of course.”

“So that’s all you raw recruits have larned from my schoolin’, is it?” and a stranger would have said the old man was almost beside himself with anger. “You ain’t got the first roodiments of the service, if you allow that orficers are to do sich jobs when there’s a lot of bloomin’ privates ’round. You’re Colonel Scammell’s aides now an’ bound to do credit to my teachin’. Ride over to headquarters like as if you was gentlemen, an’ the dirty work will all be done when you get back.”

“But we don’t intend to let you do it alone, Jepson,” Ned said earnestly.

“Lootenant Allen,” and the veteran straightened himself up with a flourish, “salute your sooperior orficer!”

Ned did as he was commanded, trying hard not to laugh.

“Now do your duty,” and Jepson waved his hand in adieu with a gesture so comical that his pupils could not repress their mirth.

It was evident the old soldier did not intend the young lieutenants should perform the duties of privates, and to avoid giving positive offense the boys were forced to leave him.

Their labors on this day were comparatively light, they being sent with messages to different portions of the camp, or along the shore, and at an early hour in the evening all three were at the new quarters, where Jepson was entertaining a visitor.

While his guest was with him the old veteran was scrupulously careful to show proper respect for the young officers, and was at times so exceedingly humble that it was only with difficulty they could repress their mirth, especially when they thought of how he would give his orders after they were alone.

Jepson's guest was one of the soldiers who had marched from Dobbs Ferry, and the boys heard from him the story of the journey.

"We crossed the river at King's Ferry at night, on the 19th of August," he began, after having lighted his pipe, "an' went into camp at Kakeat, where we laid till the 25th."

"Did the whole army stay there so long?" Ned asked in surprise.

"I don't answer for the rest; all I can tell is what Colonel Scammell's detachment did. A private don't get to know much of what is goin' on outside his own corps. On the night of the 26th we was at Paramus, an' two days later reached Springfield. The 29th we struck Brunswick, an' made a

Jay's march to Princeton. Another twenty-four hours took us to Trenton. On the first of September we crossed the Delaware, an' camped a dozen miles or so above Philadelphia. Next day we passed through the city, an' on the third was three miles the other side of Chester, where seven men deserted from Captain Comstock's company. The fourth of September we did twenty good miles, passin' through Chester, Brandywine an' Wilmington."

"Did you capture the deserters?" Ned asked.

"There wasn't time to make a try for it; besides we was better off without soldiers like 'em. Next day we did twelve miles, an' at night another renegade deserted. On the 6th we marched to Elk River, where we laid three days. September 9th we had a three-mile tramp to the head of Chesapeake Bay, an' next day was packed into transports. Twenty-four hours afterward, we started; sailed 'bout ten miles; anchored; got under way next mornin', an' dropped anchor at Annapolis. There we stopped four days, an' on the fifth did only two miles. On the 17th of the month we anchored off the Potomac River, an' on the 19th made York River. What looked like it was goin' to be a tough job turned out nothin' more'n ordinary hard work. The marchin' was easier than packin' ourselves into the transports.

Jepson's visitor did not remain very long after telling his story, and then, as usual, the young officers were "put through their paces."

On the following morning the boys received a note from Colonel Scammell which provoked no slight amount of criticism from the veteran.

“ You will at once set out on the road leading to New Kent Court House, and ride at a leisurely pace until nightfall, looking for stragglers. Halt at sunset, and in the morning return. You are to arrive here not earlier than six in the evening.”

“ Well,” Jepson said, when the note had been read aloud twice, in order that it might be thoroughly understood, “ if it wasn’t Colonel Scammell what sent that, I’d say the writer better let hisself out for a fiddler, or some sich ornamental work. Stragglers ’twixt here an’ New Kent Court House! You might as well look for fleas in a snowball! There’s no sense in that ’ere order, no matter who writ it!”

“ What shall we do?” Josh asked.

“ Do? Do, you bloomin’ raw recruit? What else is there to do but saddle an’ light out? Soldiers don’t try to understand orders, ’less they’re alone same’s we are; but jump in an’ obey ’em like *you’re* bound to. I’ll see that you have grub enough, an’ it won’t be well to spend five minutes gettin’ the hosses ready. I don’t count on any officers I’ve trained bein’ hauled over the coals on account of idlin’ ’round after the word to march has been given.”

In a trifle more than the time set by Jepson the young officers were riding out of the camp.

They had ceased to speculate upon the odd errand, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of a ride in the clear, bracing air.

As the veteran had predicted, they found no signs of stragglers, and on the following afternoon came into camp, first going to Colonel Scammell's tent to report.

There they found no one but the orderly, and by him were told to return to their own quarters.

"Got back, eh?" Jepson said when they arrived. "Had a fine time, I reckon?"

"Yes; but we didn't see any stragglers," Josh replied as he dismounted and unsaddled the mule.

"Of course not; that wasn't why you went."

"What do you know about it?" Ned asked quickly.

"Colonel Stewart told me the meanin' of that order."

"What was it?"

"Well, you see, that spy of your'n was tried yesterday, an' hanged this mornin'. Seein's how you raw recruits caught him, it was thought you might be too soft-hearted to see the job done."

The boys stood silent and motionless several seconds, gazing in amazement at Jepson.

"Sim hanged?" Josh managed to say at length.

"That's the size of it. After the main army was here it didn't take long to convict him of bein' a spy. Even without the evidence the soldiers gave, he'd been hung, 'cause his partner went back on him an' told the whole story."

“What was done to Bart?” Ned asked.

“Drummed out of camp after seein’ the last of Perkins. I don’t allow that chap will ever go into the spy business ag’in, for he was ’bout as scared a man as I ever seen.”

Ben was more affected by the news than his companions, and during a few moments Josh fancied he was going to faint.

“Look here, lootenant,” Jepson cried sternly, “this ere’s never goin’ to do! The spy only got what he deserved, an’ the same as would have been dealt out to you, if he’d knowed you was in Yorktown while he was there. You mustn’t be chicken-hearted, ’cause you’re goin’ to see a good deal worse than the hangin’ of a snake ’twixt now an’ another week.”

Ben made a brave effort to control his feelings, but would not have succeeded without the aid of his companions, who did all in their power to divert his thoughts.

From that moment, until many months had passed, the subject was never mentioned in his presence.

When the boys saw Colonel Scammell on the following morning not a word was said regarding their journey; but probably this was due to the fact that the order had finally been given for an advance, and every individual member of the army was in a state of the highest excitement.

“This means that we shall be set at work,” Colonel Scammell said after assigning the boys

their duties for the day. "At last we are to try conclusions with the king's troops, and the game will soon be opened. Many of us will not live to know the result, but those who are alive when the last gun is fired, will, I trust most implicitly, see the king's rule in this country virtually at an end."

"May I inquire if there is any possibility of an immediate engagement?" Ned asked after a short pause.

"Not until the town has been invested. It is hardly probable General Cornwallis will meet us outside his works, otherwise there would have been no such elaborate preparations for defense. You need not fear but that we shall have plenty of fighting, however," he added with a smile, "and I am pleased to know the men are eager for it. Have you seen the commander-in-chief's order?"

"No, sir."

"Get a copy of it from Major Hudson. It will be ready to-day at parade; but you will not be there to hear it, since I have decided to send you down the road seven or eight miles, to learn if there are any indications of the enemy in that direction. Do not go further than I have said, and in event of a discovery return at your best pace."

Half an hour later, when the horses were saddled for the work of the day, Ned read aloud the order:

"If the enemy should be tempted to meet the army on its march, the general particularly enjoins the troops to place their principal reliance on the

bayonet, that they may prove the vanity of the boast which the British make of their peculiar prowess in deciding battles with that weapon. He trusts a generous emulation will actuate the allied armies; that the French, whose national weapon is that of close fight, and the troops in general, that have so often used it with success, will distinguish themselves on every occasion that offers. The justice of the cause in which we are engaged, and the honor of the two nations, must inspire every breast with sentiments that are the presage of victory."

"That sounds like business," Jepson said in a tone of satisfaction when Ned ceased reading. "So we're to go at 'em with bayonets, eh? It ain't a bad idee to give 'em a taste of their own medicine, an' I allow we'll show that us rebels can play that game as well as the British. Where'd you raw recruits be when it came to close quarters, if I hadn't spent my valerable time givin' you sword play?"

"We'd come out slim for a fact, an' I ain't so certain but that we shall anyway," Josh replied grimly. "It's one thing to play with a sword, but quite another when it's a case of life or death."

"There won't be so much chance for fine points, an' I'll back you, Lootenant Higgins, ag'in the best of the privates in the British army. Of course an officer could pink you without much trouble."

"In that case my skill ag'in the privates wouldn't 'mount to a great deal," Josh said with a laugh as he leaped into the saddle, and a few moments later the young officers were riding over the road which,

on the morrow, would be traversed by the allied armies.

“They’re brave lads, an’ merry ones,” Jepson said to himself as he looked after the boys until they were lost to view in the distance; “but if they knew how proud I am of ’em, never another salute could I get out of the crowd. There’ll be plenty of blood spilled before long, but I’ll hope none of it comes from them.”

The young officers returned shortly after dress-parade, and reported that they had seen no signs of the enemy.

During the remainder of the day they were actively employed as messengers, and before the sun had set learned that their duties were more arduous than if they were attached to some company.

All three were completely tired when they reached their tent that evening, but, thanks to the appetizing supper which Jepson had prepared, were soon in a condition to take a last lesson in fencing before it might be necessary to employ their swords in destroying or saving life.

At an early hour the army was in motion.

The troops were in light marching order, that they might be ready for action at a moment’s notice, and the day’s work consisted only of a leisurely tramp of eleven miles over a good road, under a clear sky.

Then they were halted, and for the first time the young officers saw a line of battle formed.

The troops were within a mile of the British works, forming a line which extended from the York River, through the fields to Warwick Creek. The French were on the left; the Americans on the right, and, consequently, nearest the enemy.

The following order was read to the expectant men :

“The whole army, officers and soldiers, will lay on their arms this night.”

In the distance several reports of cannon were heard immediately after the order was read, and the hearts of three lieutenants beat loudly, for in their ignorance they fancied the battle had been opened.

“You will ride to the left, Lieutenant Higgins, and ascertain the cause of that firing,” Colonel Scammell said quietly, and for a single instant Josh appeared to be suffering from fear.

Before any one save his companions had had time to note the expression on his face, Josh wheeled the mule sharply around, and rode at full speed toward, as he supposed, the entire British force.

“His sword-play won’t do him much good among cannon,” Ben whispered nervously.

“We mustn’t think of such things,” Ned replied seriously. “I’m willing to admit that I’m about as scared as a fellow well can be; but it’s only making matters worse to keep in mind the possibility of being shot.”

“How can you prevent it?”

“I’m going to figure it out this way: After a battle, no matter how severe a one, there are always

very many—the greater portion of each army—left alive. Now instead of fancying every shot is coming our way, say that we're going to be among the living when it is all over, and then it won't seem so dreadful."

"You may be able to do that, but I can't. The reports of those guns send cold shivers all over me."

"Josh is the one who should be trembling about this time," Ned said with as firm a voice as was possible under the circumstances, "for he must be in the midst of it all."

Ben was trembling with fear, but yet when Colonel Scammell, a few moments later, sent him across the field to the right, he rode as bravely, so far as outward appearances were concerned, as any officer in the line could have done.

Ned and Ben were side by side when Josh returned.

"Some of the French troops are clearing the ground in front of them with two fieldpieces, sir," Lieutenant Higgins reported to his colonel with a formal salute.

"Have the enemy appeared in that direction?"

"A squad of Tarleton's men were to be seen, but they are now retiring toward the town."

His report concluded, Josh rode up to his friends, and whispered, as he wiped the perspiration from his face:

"Did I look scared when I started down there?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, I was, an' for two or three minutes I'd

have given all my fine clothes to be back in Manchester. If the beginnin' is as bad as this, I'll cut a mighty poor figger when the fight is well on."

"Lootenant Higgins," Jepson said in a loud voice, and with a profound salute as he came up from among the men, "may I speak with you?"

Josh, surprised at the humble bearing of his instructor, leaned over to hear what he had to say.

"I had to treat you with respect while the men might see an' hear me," the old fellow whispered; "but you bloomin' raw recruit, I don't feel any of it. You're a precious green orficer, you be, but, my boy, you made me feel proud of myself when you rode straight as an arrer inter what you thought was a fight!"

Then, squeezing the boy's hand until he nearly cried out because of the pain, Jepson stepped back among his comrades.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SIEGE.

THERE was but little sleep for the young officers during this first night in the field.

Even had it been possible to make themselves comfortable, it is doubtful if slumber would have come to their eyelids because of the anxiety all felt. At last they were to take part in the affairs of war, and there was a horrible reality to it of which neither had ever so much as dreamed.

Once Ned walked to that portion of the camp where Jepson was stationed, and found him sleeping peacefully on the hard ground, evidently not one whit disturbed regarding what the morrow might have in store for him.

“Nearly all the soldiers are taking advantage of the opportunity in the same fashion,” Ned said to his comrades. “I don’t understand how they can be so calm when we may be attacked at any moment.”

“Perhaps we shall get used to it,” Josh suggested. “I did think I could sleep anywhere; but my eyes are open as wide as if I’d jest crawled out of a comfortable bed.

When the morning dawned the boys realized that if they had spent the time in the same manner

as did their companions, all three would have been in better condition for the day's work.

And the work began early.

Since the enemy had not shown himself, the American wing of the army moved yet further to the right, and the town was regularly invested.

Between the colonists and the French was a tract of marshes, with several streams running through them, and over the larger of these, bridges were thrown during the early morning, so that it was possible for the besiegers to communicate with each other readily.

It was eight o'clock in the morning, and the young officers were breakfasting with Jepson, when an aide from Colonel Scammell came with an order for all four to report to their commander at once.

The old soldier, guessing what service was to be demanded of them, appeared in high glee, and said, as they hurried toward where the colonel was standing :

"I didn't reckon I'd be on hand when you got the first smell of burnin' powder ; but it seems I'm in luck."

"What do you mean?" Ben asked nervously. "It doesn't look as if there was to be an engagement very soon."

"Neither will there be, my bloomin' lootenant ; but there's allers lots of small jobs fust, to keep the privates from growin' rusty, an' I reckon this is one of 'em."

Before he could explain the meaning of his words they were by the colonel's side.

“Lieutenant Jaffreys,” the commander said with an air of formality such as the boys had never seen him wear. “You and your brother officers will take a squad of skirmishers from the light infantry, and feel of the enemy in our front. You are not expected to advance nearer than their picket-line. Jepson will accompany you to give advice.”

With this brief order the colonel turned away, and Josh stood staring at his companions in open-mouthed astonishment, for such an honor was not only entirely unexpected, but incomprehensible.

“Call out your men!” Jepson whispered eagerly. “Can’t you see that we’re not the only party bound on the same business, an’ mustn’t let the others get the lead of us?”

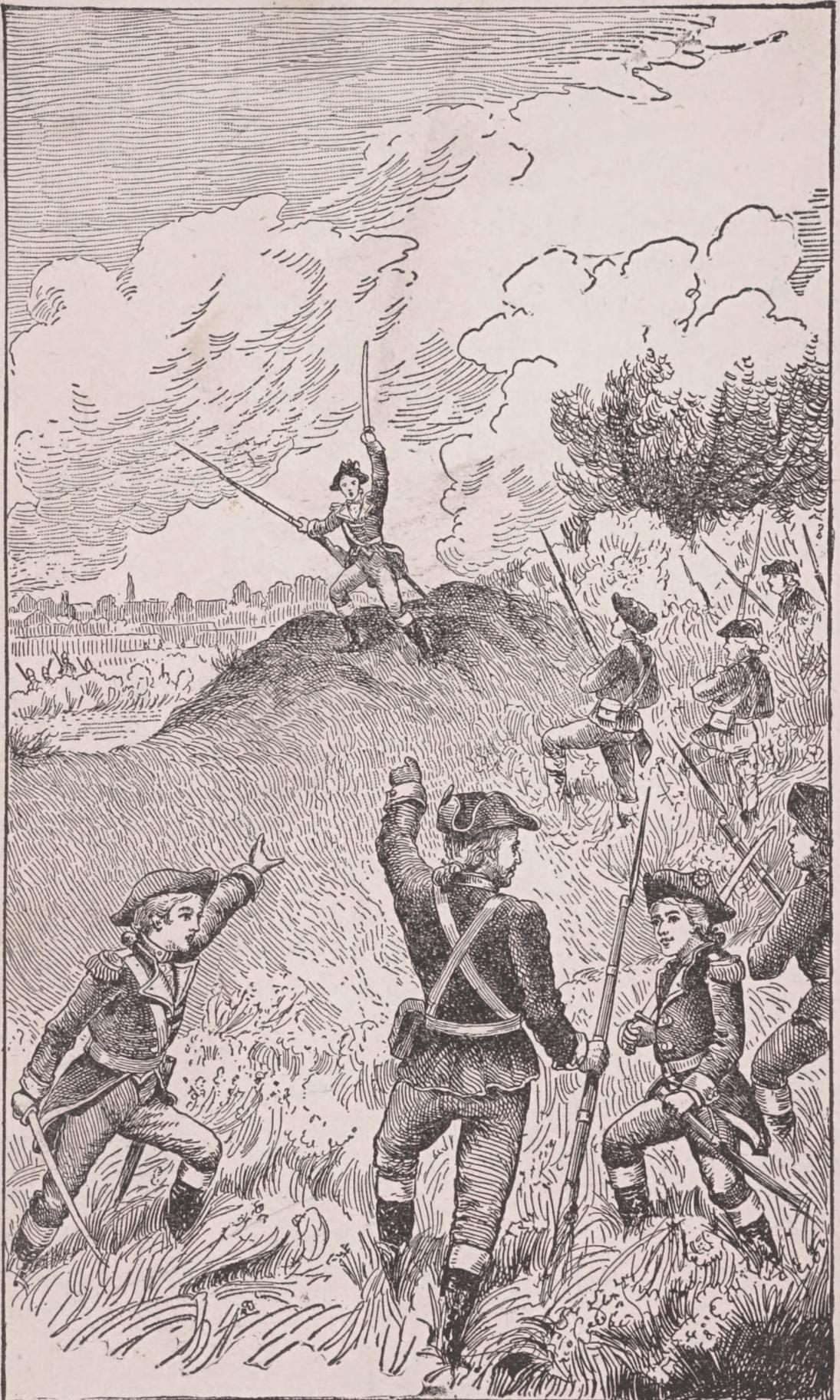
“Tell me what to do. It seems as if I had forgotten everything you ever drilled into me.”

The old soldier gave the necessary commands in a whisper, which were repeated by Josh, and so well was this done by the young officer and his “adviser,” that the men who obeyed had no idea of the frequent prompting.

There was ample opportunity for skirmishing on this morning, and an hour had not elapsed before the New Hampshire boys were in the “thick of it.”

Because of the men around them, neither of the young officers had a chance to whisper to the other that he felt horribly afraid, and Jepson was ever watchful lest they should display signs of timidity.

The first shot which whistled over Ben’s head



“Come on,” Josh shouted to the soldiers, waving the musket in one hand and his sword in the other.—Page 271.

caused him to stoop very suddenly, and the veteran whispered :

“Stand up to it, lad dear! There’s jest as much show of gettin’ hit near the ground as high in the air. Remember, every man is watchin’ you.”

As a matter of course each soldier in the squad was intent only on what was before him, but the possibility of such a thing as being discovered a coward was sufficient to stiffen Ben’s back at once, and almost before he was aware of the fact he was moving to and fro with an air of unconcern.

“The first of it is the worst,” he said to Ned ten minutes later, when the two met for an instant. “It’s queer, but I don’t seem to mind the bullets now ; perhaps they’re not coming so thickly.”

“You’re doing well, Ben. The only trouble with you is, that you’re forever trying to prove yourself a coward.”

A ringing cheer from the men interrupted this brief conversation, and on looking around to ascertain the cause, the boys saw Josh standing with a smoking musket in his hands, a fair target for the enemy.

“Come on!” Josh shouted to the soldiers, waving the musket in one hand and his sword in the other. “Them fellers won’t give us any more trouble, an’ we can drive ’em all in!”

A dozen or more of those nearest followed the boy, and the rattle of musketry soon told they were hotly engaged.

“What is he doing with that gun?” Ned asked as Jepson came up.

“Didn’t you see the whole thing?” the veteran cried excitedly. “It was the finest bit of work we shall have for many a day! Two Britishers were over in that brush, and shootin’ mighty nigh the mark every time. Three or four of the best shots on the line had had a go at ’em without stoppin’ their fire, when the lootenant seized a musket from the feller nearest, winged one Britisher, an’ before you would wink twice had grabbed another gun an’ wiped out the other. A couple of handsomer shots couldn’t be seen anywhere, an’ our raw recruit won’t want followers after this! Talk ’bout fightin’, it comes natural as breath to that lad!”

Jepson was so excited it was with difficulty the young officers could persuade him to remain with them, and when Ben expressed his fears that Josh would recklessly expose himself, the old fellow roared:

“I’d hate to see a promisin’ lad like him wiped out; but it wouldn’t be so bad ’cause he’s done his share already! It’s honor enough for a boy to wing a couple of men as he did!”

The rattle of musketry died away, and a few moments later, Josh, begrimed with powder, his sword in its scabbard but the musket in his hands, came out of the thicket at the head of the men, looking every inch a soldier.

“It’s a shame our orders were not to go beyond the picket-line! We could have driven ’em straight through the town!”

This ended the skirmishing for the day, and when the young lieutenants returned to camp, Josh was the hero of the hour among the men.

The older soldiers had paid very little attention to the New Hampshire boys whose commissions were earned outside the battlefield; but now they treated Josh with the greatest respect, and their admiration found vent in every possible way.

The story was told over and over again by those who accompanied the boy on his mad charge, until it reached Colonel Scammell's ears, and he read Jepson a severe lecture for allowing Josh to do anything so reckless.

"It would a' been a heart of stone that could have stopped the lad, sir. He was havin' the best time of his life, an' how could I interfere with his amusement?"

"Teach him to amuse himself in a more guarded manner. Inexperienced as he is, it seems little less than murder to allow him to do such things in his first action."

"I'll give him a good dressin' down, sir, but it goes mightily ag'in the grain to do it."

And this is the manner in which Jepson "dressed down" the rash officer:

"You bloomin' idjut, don't you know how to take care of yourself in action? You mustn't rage 'round like a mad bull, but preserve your dignity before the men. But say, Josh, lad, you're the cleanest hand with a musket I ever set eyes on, an' when I'm feelin' down at the heel owin' to troubles,

I'll follow you on the skirmish-line to brighten me up a bit. I'm proud of you, lad, proud of havin' made a soldier of you!"

On the next morning the American forces were treated to a very pleasant surprise, by discovering that during the night the enemy had abandoned his outer lines, and retired to the inner defenses.

This enabled the allied forces to take up much more advantageous positions than had originally been decided upon, and at the same time afford an opportunity for throwing up earthworks within easy shelling distance of the town.

Colonel Scammell was officer of the day, and the young lieutenants were kept busy.

"You will reconnoiter the deserted works," he said to Josh at an early hour during the forenoon. "Summon your comrades, and follow me."

There appeared to be little danger attending such an excursion, and the boys viewed it in the light of a diversion.

No signs of the enemy in the immediate vicinity were seen, and the colonel said to his followers after the works had been hurriedly examined :

"Remain here until I return, or our troops come up; I intend to ride a short distance toward the town."

Dismounting, the boys took up such positions as enabled them to view the movements of their own troops, and remained interested spectators of the novel scene spread out before them, until the discharge of a single musket from the direction in

which Colonel Scammell had ridden caused Ben to start up in alarm.

“Do you suppose an attack has been made upon him?”

“It don’t sound much like it,” Josh replied after waiting a few seconds without hearing a repetition of the noise. “I reckon it would take more than one man to make trouble for the colonel.”

“Then, unsuspecting of what had really occurred, the boys continued to watch the troops until nearly an hour had passed, when a soldier hurried into the works just as a body of light infantry were taking possession.

“Colonel Scammell has been made prisoner!” he shouted.

“Where?” and Josh ran toward his mule.

“It is too late now; he has been carried to the town. The murderers shot him after he had surrendered his sword!”

“What was you doin’ all the time?” Josh asked angrily.

“I was on the picket post too far away for any assistance.”

“Why didn’t you try to do something? If you were near enough to see, you surely might have gone up before they could get him into town.”

“Twenty men couldn’t have prevented the capture. A squad of troopers from Tarleton’s Legion dashed down upon him.”

“Was he killed?”

“No, although it appeared as if he was badly wounded.”

“Where are you going?” Ned asked as Josh mounted.

“To tell the general.”

“Which one?”

“General Lafayette, of course. He’ll send men out to recapture the colonel, an I’ll go with ’em.”

“But you forget, Josh, that we are now in the American wing of the army, and our own officers should receive the information first. Here comes Colonel Humphreys. He is the one who ought to be told.”

Lieutenant-Colonel David Humphreys, General Washington’s aide, was just entering the works, and to him Josh repeated the sad news.

This done, the boys returned to their quarters to seek advice of Jepson as to their duties, and he recommended them to remain quiet until definite orders were sent them.

“It is known you were on the poor colonel’s staff, an’ you’ll be told when a change of assignment has been made.”

This was not such advice as Josh wanted. He was eager to do something toward avenging the barbarous deed, for the soldier who witnessed the affair was positive Colonel Scammell had been shot after surrendering, and, but for Jepson, might have committed some serious offense against military discipline.

Late in the afternoon, to the surprise of the besiegers, a flag of truce was seen coming from the town, and soon word was passed around the camp

that Colonel Scammell had been released on parole.

Now the young lieutenants turned nurses, agreeing among themselves that each should remain with the wounded officer eight hours out of every twenty-four, and those off duty would attend to such camp work as was not performed by the servants.

Thus it was they took no active part in the task of throwing up earthworks, or in the bombardment.

Jepson brought them from time to time information of what was being done, and Josh had no cause for sorrow that he might be missing an engagement, since nothing in the way of actual fighting was undertaken, save by the artillerymen.

On the 6th of October Colonel Scammell died, all three of the young lieutenants being in his tent at the time, and their sorrow would have been even greater than it was, but for the fact that within two hours after the gallant soldier passed away they received orders to report for duty under Colonel Stewart.

The final advance upon the besieged town was to be begun.

The approach was to be made by parallels, and while a certain number of men labored at digging, a much larger force remained under arms near at hand to repel possible attacks.

The trench was completed by sunrise, and before the enemy had any idea of what was being done. That the English knew some movement was in

progress could be told by the fact that a steady fire was poured in upon the troops, although, owing to the darkness, their aim was so bad that not more than twenty were killed or wounded.

Ben had believed it would be impossible for him to sleep while an engagement was imminent; yet when relieved from duty after this night's fatiguing work, he threw himself on the ground by the side of a wounded soldier, and slept soundly for five hours, during which time the artillerymen were constantly at work.

"The Yorktown Campaign," by Johnston, contains the following regarding this portion of the siege, and since the boys were kept at the same duty during the entire ten days, with hardly an opportunity to converse with each other, the situation will be better understood from the paragraph than if a detailed account of all their movements was given:

"For ten days, now, until the closing scene, the siege was conducted with the greatest system and activity. The first Continental troops to occupy the trenches on the forenoon of the 7th were Lafayette's light infantry. They marched in with the tread of veterans, colors flying, drums beating, and planted their standards on the parapet. The enemy saluted them with a few shots without effect. Digging went on. It was proposed to make the parallel safe against sorties, and four palisaded redoubts and five batteries had accordingly been marked for construction at proper intervals along

the line. Upon these and the trenches the fatigue parties worked incessantly under the enemy's fire, which at times was severe; but the casualties were few. The duty proved taxing, and many soldiers were taken down with the ague, French especially. In the enemy's camp over one thousand were reported on the sick list. They were digging there defensively quite as hard as the allies offensively. . . .

“Industrious digging on the part of the allies continued night and day, until by the afternoon of the 9th a sufficient number of batteries had been erected to open the bombardment of Yorktown. The first to fire, at three o'clock, was the French battery on the extreme left, opposite the British Fusileers' redoubt. It had been erected by the regiment Touraine, and mounted four twelve-pounders and six howitzers and mortars. Its fire compelled the frigate *Guadaloupe* to retire to the Gloucester shore. At five o'clock the American battery on the extreme right, on the river bank below, which appears to have been under the charge of Captain Ferguson, of the Fourth Artillery, followed with discharges from six eighteen and twenty-four pounders, four mortars, and two howitzers, and the serious work of the siege had begun.”

By this time the young lieutenants began to consider themselves entitled to the name of soldiers.

They had participated in all the wearying work, exposed to fire every hour while in the trenches, which was often twelve or fifteen out of the twenty-

four, and never flinching in the slightest, whatever the duty demanded of them.

Jepson must have believed they had graduated from his school, for he no longer insisted on their saluting him during leisure moments, and paid them the same respect he accorded to older officers.

"I've done a great work," he said one night when the four were coming out of the trenches in company.

"Yes, it's been mighty hard, an' I shall be glad when we have a chance to go for the Britishers in good earnest," Josh replied, thinking the old man referred to the labor just performed.

"I'm not talkin' of what's been done this day."

"What is it then?"

"It's great when you think what I've made out of three as green lads as ever struck a camp."

"Meanin' us, of course?"

"Where did you ever see greener ones than you, when you come here from Dobbs Ferry?"

"It don't make any difference so long as you're willin' to call us soldiers now."

"I'll have to do that, lad, for you boys are actin' your part in this 'ere scrimmage like men."

"That's enough for me!" Josh cried gleefully. "I'm satisfied now, an' shall be till the battle opens in good earnest."

"There's a sharp bit of fightin' goin' on this night, but you won't be in it, my bantam."

"What do you mean now?"

"The two outer redoubts are to be stormed an' you're not among them who are to take part."

“But I’ll go any way,” Josh replied stoutly.

“No, you won’t, lad. It’s as much the part of a good soldier to obey orders as it is to fight. The French are to play one end of the game, and General Steuben’s division the other. We can stay in camp suckin’ our thumbs while the sport is goin’ on.”

One would have said Josh had been wronged in some way, so angry and disappointed was he when Jepson proved that he could not take part in the assault.

At one time he declared he would go to General Steuben himself and beg for permission to accompany the detachment; but Jepson immediately asserted his authority of teacher.

“Do you think you’re the only brave one in this camp?” he cried angrily. When you see hundreds of men who have fought ag’in overwhelmin’ odds for six long years, do you fancy what you did between here an’ Dobbs Ferry entitles you to more privileges than they? I’d give six days rations an’ go hungry, for the sake of bein’ with the boys this night; but I’m not sich an idjut as to whine ’cause it was my luck to be left out in the cold, an’ there’s many a man here who’s feelin’ same’s I am.”

Josh was ashamed to make any more complaint.

While Jepson was speaking so earnestly, that which he and his companions had done seemed suddenly to dwindle into insignificance, and he realized what a vivid contrast there was between his services and those of the brave fellows who had re-

mained in the Continental army so many long, dreary years.

There was little sleep on this night, however, either for the boys or Jepson, despite the fact that they had been in the trenches during all the hours of daylight.

The four watched the assaulting parties set out silently, and then waited, almost breathless with excitement, for the signal to be given, for both forces were to make the attack at the same moment.

The discharge of six shells was finally seen and heard, and the tumult of battle began.

“It’s a big time, an’ I ain’t in it!” Josh said mournfully, after which he spoke not a word until the victory had been won, when he joined with those around him in cheering the brave men who had that night written their names on the roll of honor.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SURRENDER.

JOSH missed another skirmish, which might almost have been called an engagement, and began to think his "luck" had deserted him.

It was on the night of the 15th when four hundred of the English forces made a sortie on that part of the line farthest from where the young lieutenants were stationed.

"You see if I miss the next one!" Josh said savagely when it was over, and the enemy defeated in his purpose. "I'll do my share of this work if I have to resign my commission, an' go in as a private!"

"An' how would that benefit you, my hearty?" Jepson cried mockingly. "I allow the privates are held in their places more sharp than you bloomin' lootnants. The only way I can see out of it for an' idjut like you, is to send Corney word of where you're stationed, an' ask if he'll be pleased to give you a chance to get your head split open."

"It may be fixed better'n that, my bloomin' private, an' when I've found out how, I'll keep my mouth shut. Then it'll be you who howls 'cause you don't get a fair show."

“You wouldn’t go without me, Lootenant Higgins?”

“Just wait an’ see.”

“But think that I’m the one what has made you a ornament to your perfession, an’ then say if you’d sneak off, leavin’ me in the lurch?”

“I believe you are as bad as Josh,” Ned cried laughingly. “It is a shame that you can’t get your fill of such work, especially when there is so much of it going on.”

Josh continued to grumble until they had an opportunity to lie down for the remainder of the night, and next morning he was abroad bright and early, asking the opinion of every one he met as to where the next assault or sortie would probably be made.

It was destined, however, that the ambitious lieutenant should not see any more fighting in the vicinity of Yorktown.

During the forenoon of the 17th of October a red-coated drummer mounted the enemy’s parapet, and began to beat a “parley.”

The young lieutenants were stationed almost directly opposite, and Josh clambered up on the earthworks, regardless of the possible danger, to learn the meaning of the strange action.

Jepson succeeded in gaining his pupil’s side just as an officer appeared near the drummer, waving a white handkerchief.

During an instant the old soldier stood as if suddenly stricken motionless, and then he shouted:

“It’s surrender, boys! It’s surrender! Corney has had enough of it!”

The more incredulous believed that a truce was asked for because of some unimportant matter; but soon every man in camp knew that the English commander had requested a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours in order that the terms of surrender might be decided upon.

“Then there is to be no more fightin’?” Josh asked of Jepson.

“No more here, thank God! Perhaps the war ends with this!”

“And I shan’t be able to prove I’ve got the right to wear a sword.”

“You’ve shown that already, lad, an’ you’ll soon have a chance to witness what my eyes have been achin’ to see.”

“What’s that?”

“The surrender of British forces to the soldiers of the Continental Congress! Corney, proud as he is, must swallow the pill he’s offered to take.”

“Will he come out now?” Ben asked, as he and Ned joined the veteran and the “raw recruit.”

“Not till everything is settled; but it’s bound to come soon, an’ you got here in time to be in at the death.”

Ned was more interested in the scene which was being enacted in the trenches than by the conversation of his friends, and it was one long to be remembered.

Men were embracing each other; shouting like

boys, as if they could give vent to their feelings only by noise; some laughing while tears streamed down their cheeks, and others capering like jumping-jacks.

There were many soldiers present who had served six years, with never a scene like this to cheer them men who had suffered from hunger, from cold when they had insufficient clothing, and men who had been forced to go into an engagement without ammunition because there was none to be had. Now all these sufferings and privations were to be rewarded; one of the ablest officers in the king's service had acknowledged himself vanquished by the rebels, and was suing for an opportunity to surrender!

From this moment until the hour of the grand spectacle on the afternoon of October 20th, the young officers were hardly aware how the time passed, so intense was the excitement everywhere within the American lines.

Josh's mule received an unusual grooming on this day, for the three lieutenants were to fill their respective stations on Colonel Stewart's staff, and what they saw that memorable afternoon can best be described by one who was present—Lieutenant-Colonel Harry Lee, as set down in Lee's "Memoirs:"

"At two o'clock in the evening the British army, led by General O'Hara, marched out of its lines with colors cased, and drums beating a British march.

"The author was present at this ceremony; and

certainly no spectacle could be more impressive than the one now exhibited. Valiant troops yielding up their arms after fighting in defense of a cause dear to them (because the cause of their country), under a leader who, throughout the war, in every grade and in every situation to which he had been called, appeared the Hector of his host. Battle after battle had he fought; climate after climate had he endured; towns had yielded to his mandate; posts were abandoned at his approach; armies were conquered by his prowess; one nearly exterminated, another chased from the confines of South Carolina beyond the Dan into Virginia, and a third severely chastised in that State on the shores of James River. But here even he, in the midst of his splendid career, found his conqueror.

“The road through which they marched was lined with spectators, French and American. On one side the commander-in-chief, surrounded by his suite and the American staff, took his station; on the other side, opposite to him, was the Count de Rochambeau, in like manner attended. The captive army approached, moving slowly in column with grace and precision. Universal silence was observed amid the vast concourse, and the utmost decency prevailed: exhibiting in demeanor an awful sense of the vicissitudes of human life, mingled with commiseration for the unhappy. The head of the column approached the commander-in-chief; O’Hara, mistaking the circle, turned to that on his left, for the purpose of paying his respects to the

commander-in-chief, and requesting further orders ; when, quickly discovering his error, with much embarrassment in his countenance he flew across the road, and, advancing up to Washington, asked pardon for his mistake, apologized for the absence of Lord Cornwallis, and begged to know his further pleasure. The general, feeling his embarrassment, relieved it by referring him with much politeness to General Lincoln for his government. Returning to the head of the column, it again moved under the guidance of Lincoln to the field selected for the conclusion of the ceremony.

“Every eye was turned, searching for the British commander-in-chief, anxious to look at that man, heretofore so much the object of their dread. All were disappointed. Cornwallis held himself back from the humiliating scene ; obeying sensations which his great character ought to have stifled. He had been unfortunate, not from any false step or deficiency of exertion on his part, but from the infatuated policy of his superior, and the united power of his enemy, brought to bear upon him alone. There was nothing with which he could reproach himself ; there was nothing with which he could reproach his brave and faithful army ; why not, then, appear at its head in the day of misfortune, as he had always done in the day of triumph ? The British general in this instance deviated from his usual line of conduct, dimming the splendor of his long and brilliant career.

“The post of Gloucester, falling with that of

York, was delivered up on the same day by Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton, who had succeeded to the command on the transfer of Lieutenant-Colonel Dundas to the more important duties assigned to him in the defense of York. Previous to the surrender, Tarleton waited upon General Choisy, and communicated to that officer his apprehensions for his personal safety if put at the disposal of the American militia. This conference was sought for the purpose of inducing an arrangement which should shield him from the vengeance of the inhabitants. General Choisy did not hesitate a moment in gratifying the wishes of Tarleton. The Legion of Lauzun and the corps of Mercer were selected by the general to receive the submitting enemy, while the residue of the allied detachment was held back in camp. As soon as the ceremony of surrender was performed, Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo, of the Legion of Mercer, with his militia and grenadiers, took possession of the redoubts, and protected the hostile garrison from those outrages so seriously, though unwarrantably, anticipated by the British commandant. It would have been very satisfactory to have been enabled to give the reasons which induced this communication from Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton, but Choisy did not go into the inquiry, and they remain unascertained."

Johnston in his "Yorktown Campaign," writes regarding the details of the surrender:

"As O'Hara advanced to the chief, he was referred to Lincoln, who, upon receiving the sword

as a token of the enemy's submission, immediately returned it to the British general, whose troops then marched between the two lines to a field on the right, where they grounded their arms. For the proud and veteran soldiers, who were the heroes of repeated Southern victories, this was a humiliating ceremony, but it was done in good order. In the field a squadron of French hussars had formed a circle, and within it each regiment marched and deposited their arms."

Just here it may be well to delay the closing of the story sufficiently long to give a copy of the letter sent by Lord Cornwallis to General Clinton on the day after the surrender.

"YORK TOWN, Virginia, Oct. 20, 1781.

"SIR: I have the mortification to inform your excellency that I have been forced to give up the posts of York and Gloucester, and to surrender the troops under my command, by capitulation on the 19th instant, as prisoners of war, to the combined forces of America and France.

"I never saw this post in a very favorable light; but when I found I was to be attacked in it, in so unprepared a state, by so powerful an army and artillery, nothing but the hopes of relief would have induced me to attempt its defense; for I would either have endeavored to escape to New York by rapid marches from the Gloucester side, immediately on the arrival of General Washington's troops at Williamsburg, or, I would, notwithstanding the disparity of numbers, have attacked them in the open field, where it might have been just possible that fortune would have favored the gallantry of the

handful of troops under my command. But, being assured by your excellency's letters that every possible means would be tried by the navy and army to relieve us, I could not think myself at liberty to venture upon either of those desperate attempts; therefore, after remaining for two days in a strong position in front of this place, in hopes of being attacked, upon observing that the enemy were taking measures which could not fail of turning my left flank in a short time, and receiving on the second evening your letter of the 24th of September, that the relief would fail about the 5th of October, I withdrew within the works on the night of the 29th of September, hoping by the labor and firmness of the soldiers to protect the defense until you could arrive. Everything was to be expected from the spirit of the troops; but every disadvantage attended their labor, as the work was to be continued under the enemy's fire, and our stock of intrenching tools, which did not much exceed four hundred when we began to work in the latter end of August, was now much diminished.

“The enemy broke ground on the night of the 30th, and constructed on that night, and the two following days and nights, two redoubts, which with some works that had belonged to our outward position occupied a gorge between two creeks or ravines, which come from the river on each side of the town. On the night of the 6th of October they made their first parallel, extending from its right on the river to a deep ravine on the left nearly opposite to the center of this place, and embracing our whole left, at the distance of six hundred yards. Having perfected this parallel, their batteries opened on the evening of the 9th against our left; and other batteries fired at the same time against a redoubt over a creek upon our right, and defended by about one

hundred and twenty men of the Twenty-third regiment and marines, who maintained that post with uncommon gallantry. The fire continued incessant from heavy cannon, and from mortars and howitzers, throwing shells from eight to sixteen inches, until all our guns on the left were silenced, our works much damaged, and our loss of men considerable. On the night of the 11th they began their second parallel, about three hundred yards nearer to us. The troops being much weakened by sickness, as well as by the fire of the besiegers, and observing that the enemy had not only secured their flanks, but proceeded in every respect with the utmost regularity and caution, I could not venture so large sorties as to hope from them any considerable effect; but otherwise I did everything in my power to interrupt their work, by opening new embrasures for guns, and keeping up a constant fire with all the howitzers and small mortars we could man. On the evening of the 14th they assaulted and carried two redoubts that had been advanced about three hundred yards for the purpose of delaying their approaches and covering our left flank, and during the night included them in their second parallel, on which they continued to work with the utmost exertion. Being perfectly sensible that our works could not stand many hours after the opening of the batteries of that parallel, we not only continued a constant fire with all our mortars, and every gun that could be brought to bear on it, but a little before daybreak, on the morning of the 10th, I ordered a sortie of about three hundred and fifty men, under the direction of Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie, to attack two batteries which appeared to be in the greatest forwardness, and to spike the guns.

“A detachment of guards with the eightieth company of grenadiers, under command of Lieuten-

ant-Colonel Lake, attacked the one; and one of the light infantry, under the command of Major Armstrong, attacked the other; and both succeeded, by forcing the redoubts that covered them, spiking eleven guns and killing or wounding about one hundred of the French troops who had the guard of that part of the trenches, and with little loss on our side. The action, though extremely honorable to the officers and soldiers who executed it, proved of little public advantage; for the cannon, having been spiked in a hurry, were soon rendered fit for service again; and before dark the whole parallel and batteries appeared to be nearly complete. At this time we know that there was no part of the whole front attacked on which we could throw a single gun, and our shells were nearly expended; I had therefore only to choose between preparing to surrender next day, or endeavoring to get off with the greatest part of the troops; and I determined to attempt the latter, reflecting that, though it should prove unsuccessful in its immediate object, it might at least delay the enemy in the prosecution of further enterprises. Sixteen large boats were prepared, and upon other pretexts were ordered to be in readiness to receive troops precisely at ten o'clock: with these I hoped to pass the infantry during the night; abandoning our baggage, and leaving a detachment to capitulate for the townspeople, and the sick and wounded; on which subject a letter was ready to be delivered to General Washington. After making my arrangements with the utmost secrecy, the light infantry, greatest part of the guards, and part of the Twenty-third regiment landed at Gloucester; but at this critical moment, the weather, from being moderate and calm, changed to a violent storm of wind and rain,

and drove all the boats, some of which had troops on board, down the river. It was soon evident that the intended passage was impracticable; and the absence of the boats rendered it equally impossible to bring back the troops that had passed, which I had ordered about two in the morning. In this situation, with my little force divided, the enemy's batteries opened at daybreak. The passage between this place and Gloucester was much exposed, but the boats having now returned, they were ordered to bring back the troops that had passed during the night, and they joined in the forenoon without much loss. Our works in the meantime were going to ruin; and not having been able to strengthen them by abattis, nor in any other manner than by a light fraizing, which the enemy's artillery were demolishing wherever they fired, my opinion entirely coincided with that of the engineer and principal officers of the army, that they were in many places assailable in the forenoon, and that by the continuance of the same fire for a few hours longer they would be in such a state as to render it desperate, with our numbers, to attempt to maintain them. We at that time could not fire a single gun; only one eight-inch and a little more than a hundred cohorn shells remained; a diversion by the French ships of war that lay at the mouth of the York River was to be expected. Our numbers had been diminished by the enemy's fire, but particularly by sickness; and the strength and spirit of those in the works were much exhausted by the fatigue of constant watching and unremitting duty. Under all these circumstances, I thought it would have been wanton and inhuman to the last degree to sacrifice the lives of this small body of gallant soldiers, who had ever behaved with so much

fidelity and courage, by exposing them to an assault which, from the numbers and precautions of the enemy, could not fail to succeed. I therefore proposed to capitulate, and I have the honor to enclose to your excellency the copy of the correspondence between General Washington and me on that subject, and the terms of the capitulation agreed upon. I sincerely lament that better could not be obtained; but I have neglected nothing in my power to alleviate the misfortunes and distress of both officers and soldiers. The men are well clothed and provided with necessaries, and I trust will be regularly supplied by the means of the officers that are permitted to remain with them. The treatment in general that we have received from the enemy since our surrender has been perfectly good and proper; but the kindness and attention that has been showed to us by the French officers in particular, their delicate sensibility of our situation, their generous and pressing offers of money, both public and private, to any amount, has really gone beyond what I can possibly describe, and will, I hope, make an impression on the breast of every officer, whenever the fortune of war should put any of them in our power.

“Although the event has been so unfortunate, the patience of the soldiers in bearing the greatest fatigues, and their firmness and intrepidity under a persevering fire of shot and shells, that I believe has not often been exceeded, deserved the highest admiration and praise. A successful defense, however, in our situation was perhaps impossible; for the place could only be reckoned an intrenched camp, subject in most places to enfilade, and the ground in general so disadvantageous that nothing but the necessity of fortifying it as a post to protect

the navy could have induced any person to erect works upon it. Our force diminished daily by sickness and other losses, and was reduced, when we offered to capitulate on this side, to little more than three thousand two hundred rank and file fit for duty, including officers' servants and artificers; and at Gloucester about six hundred, including cavalry. The enemy's army consisted of upward of six thousand French, nearly as many Continentals, and five thousand militia. They brought an immense train of heavy artillery, most amply furnished with ammunition, and perfectly well manned.

“The constant and universal cheerfulness and spirit of the officers in all hardships and dangers deserve my warmest acknowledgment; and I have been particularly indebted to Brigadier-General O'Hara and Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie, the former commanding on the right, and the latter on the left, for their attention and exertion on every occasion. The detachment of the Twenty-third regiment, commanded by Captain Apthorpe, and the subsequent detachments, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson, deserve particular commendation. Captain Rochefort, who commanded the artillery, and indeed every officer and soldier of that distinguished corps, and Lieutenant Sutherland, the commanding engineer, have merited in every respect my highest approbation: and I cannot sufficiently acknowledge my obligations to Captain Symonds, who commanded His Majesty's ships, and to the other officers and seamen of the navy, for their active and zealous co-operation.

“I transmit returns of our killed and wounded; the loss of seamen and townspeople was likewise considerable. I trust your excellency will please to hasten the return of the *Bonetta*, after landing her

passengers, in compliance with the article of capitulation.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie will have the honor to explain this despatch, and is well qualified to explain to your excellency every particular relating to our past and present situation.

“I have the honor to be your excellency’s obedient servant.

“CORNWALLIS.”

CHAPTER XXI.

AT PORTSMOUTH.

It was Christmas morning in the year 1781.

The good people of Portsmouth were unusually happy on this day, for there appeared to be excellent reason for believing the long war was nearly at an end, and the words, "peace on earth," took on a deeper significance than ever before.

In the midst of the happiness and rejoicing the name of Alexander Scammell was not forgotten, and, more than one wreath of green had entwined in it a bit of black in loving remembrance of the gallant soldier who had given up his life that freedom and peace might be the heritage of his posterity.

Jacob Downs was one of the few who did not feel particularly happy on this occasion. Had there been a different ending to the siege of Yorktown he might have felt more like entering into the spirit of the festal season ; but, under all the circumstances, it seemed to him he had ample cause for discontent.

The good people of Portsmouth had not been kept in ignorance of the services rendered the Continental army by two boys from that town. Those soldiers at the siege whose homes were in that section of the country, wrote very much concerning

the young lieutenants who had received such flattering attentions from the French general, and, as a matter of course, Jacob Downs knew in what manner his nephew had distinguished himself.

To the tory the information was most disagreeable, and while hurrying down the street this particular Christmas morning, he was blaming himself for not having been more persistent in the pursuit of the runaway.

It was while his thoughts were on this unpleasant subject that he found his progress barred by three young men wearing the uniform of the Continental army, and one of them, extending his hand, said in a cheery, friendly tone :

“ Good-morning, uncle. I hope you haven’t forgotten me so soon.”

Jacob Downs’ eyesight was by no means as strong as it had been, but yet it was sufficiently keen to enable him to recognize in the officer before him the subject of his bitter thoughts.

“ So you’ve come back like the bad penny, have you ?” he asked grimly, not offering to clasp the extended hand.

“ I am back, sir, in whatever way I may have returned.”

“ When did you arrive.”

“ Last evening.”

“ And I suppose my house is too mean to be entered by a lieutenant in the rebel army.”

“ I am an officer of the *Continental* army, sir ; but I did not fail to present myself because of that

reason. My friend, Lieutenant Jaffreys, invited me to visit him, and, to tell the truth, I was doubtful as to a welcome from you."

"As well you might be, you young scoundrel!" Jacob Downs replied, speaking in more forcible language than, perhaps, he might otherwise have done, because several townspeople had halted to congratulate the young officers on their safe return. "I supported you as the son of my sister; but even a near relative has no claim on me when he proves himself a thief."

"That is a harsh word, sir, since I did no more than use the horse I had been allowed to consider my own."

"You knew *I* never made the mistake of thinking him yours, and now, after destroying my property, you expect a welcome."

"I said I was in doubt as to whether I should receive one, sir. The horse I have brought back, and he is in your stable at this moment, none the worse for the service."

"That doesn't lessen the crime. You shall be arrested for stealing him, that the youths of this town may have an example set before them. Now go to the home you have disgraced, and there remain until the officers come to take you to prison."

"What is that?" one of the bystanders asked loudly. "Who will dare arrest an officer of the army?"

"I dare!" Jacob Downs cried fiercely.

"Go ahead and see how much you can make out

of it!" another shouted. "No warrant will be granted, and in case a magistrate *should* be found so base as to do such a thing, we would see it wasn't executed. Take a word of caution from one who hasn't any respect for tories, and have a care, Jacob Downs! We have borne with you a long while, as we did with Amos Sprague, but the day finally arrived when he couldn't be tolerated any longer in this town."

Then suddenly, and to his great surprise, Ned's uncle found himself crowded aside as if he had been the meanest of Portsmouth's citizens, instead of one of the richest, and the three boys were surrounded by an admiring throng, each member of which seemed trying to outdo the other in the warmth of his greeting.

Josh was introduced, and his face quickly reddened with blushes as he heard the words of praise showered upon him.

He was as well known, by reputation, as were his comrades, and the greetings were not one whit less hearty than those bestowed upon the other officers.

"We have come here on a short furlough," Ben said in reply to many questions, "and must leave on New Year's day. Josh and Ned are my guests, by invitation from father, who is still with the army. Yes, we shall remain in the service as long as we may be needed. Lieutenant Higgins has a command, and there is every reason to believe will soon receive a captain's commission, but Ned and I are still unattached. We hope to be assigned to

Colonel Scammell's old regiment when we get back."

Ned was kept busy receiving invitations to look upon this home or that as his own; but he gratefully refused all such propositions, on the plea that he did not feel at liberty to quarter himself upon any one but his comrade.

"Don't you be a bit afeared of what Jacob Downs may do!" Samuel Tibbetts, a leading merchant, said emphatically. "It won't be safe for him to keep up his tory talk many days longer, and I shall take it upon myself to make him understand that fact. Getting his horse back is more than he deserves, but you shan't be the loser by your honesty, my lad. We of Portsmouth are proud of you, and there shall be no lack of beasts when you leave us."

From that day until the hour of their departure the boys were the recipients of the warmest hospitality, and on the evening before they set off to rejoin the army, a horse, with complete equipment, was presented to each of the young officers, as a "token of regard and esteem from the citizens of Portsmouth."

As for Ned's uncle, he did not attempt to carry out his threats, and early on the following spring sailed for England, where he could give free vent to his opinions without fear of such treatment as was openly threatened by his old neighbors.

It would be a labor of love to follow the boys during their military career into the year 1812,

when they fought again for their country, each as an officer of the line ; but to yield to such a temptation would involve the extending of this story over more pages than the reader would have patience to turn.

That the young lieutenants achieved yet greater military reputation, is already a matter of history, and there the outlines, if not the details, of their subsequent career may be traced.

THE END.

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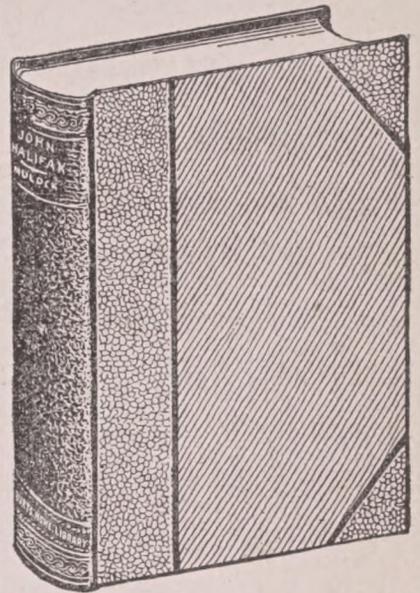
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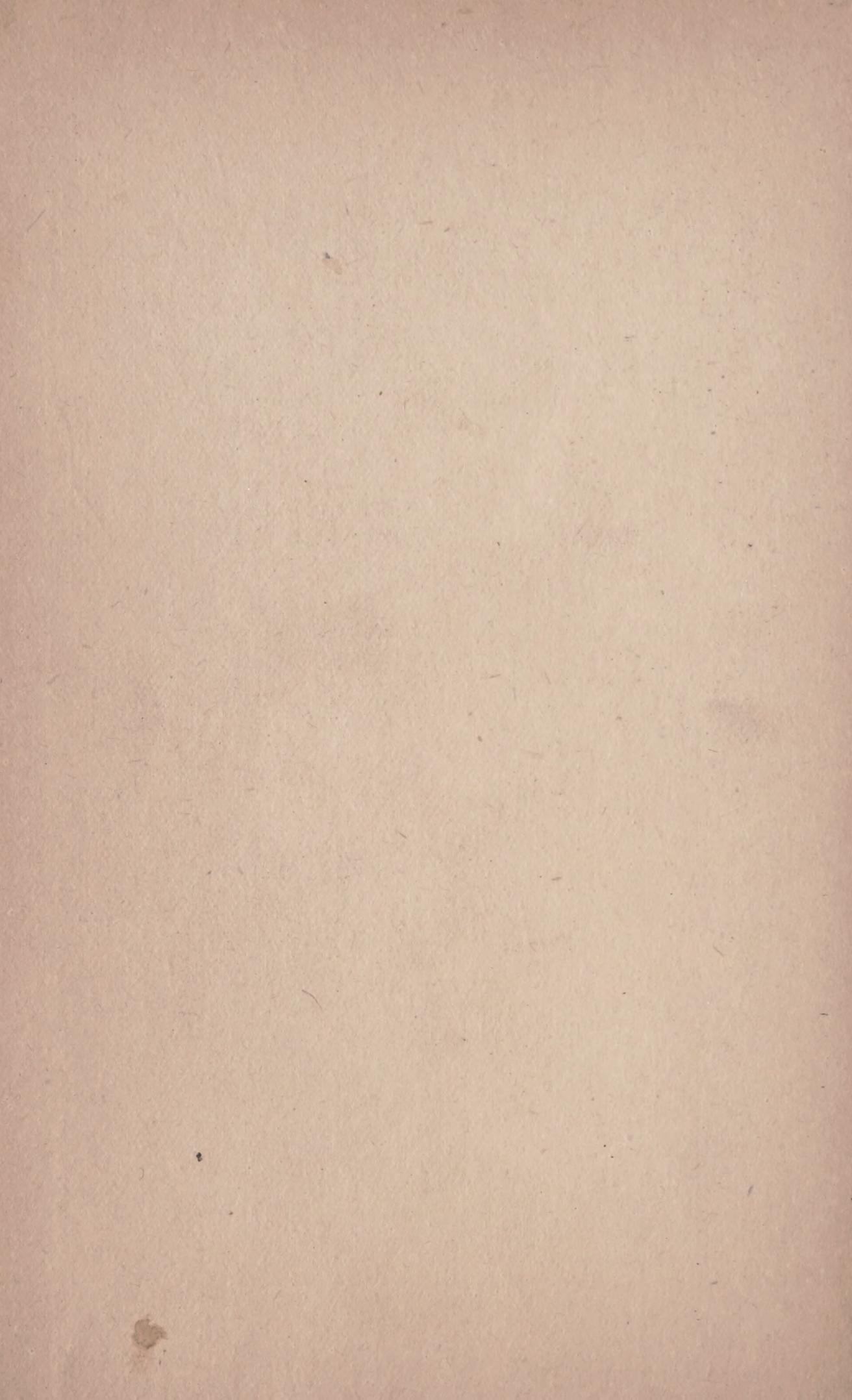
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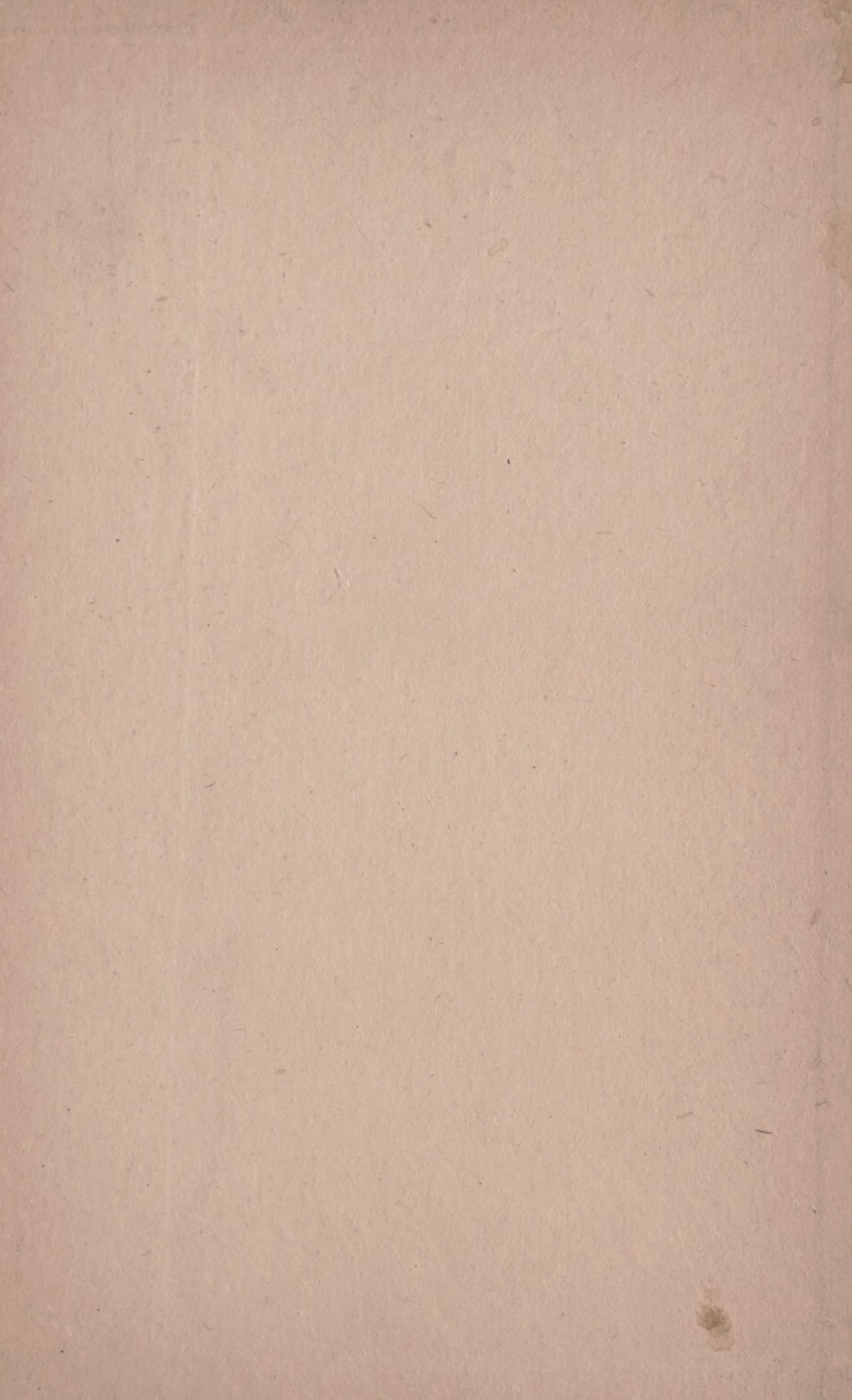
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