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“Nicholas has it in his mind to run away!” Darius exclaimed.—*Frontis.*
At the Siege of Havana.

AT THE SIEGE OF HAVANA.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THREE BOYS SERVING
UNDER ISRAEL PUTNAM IN 1762.

BEING THE STORY AS WRITTEN DOWN BY DARIUS LUNT
AND RETOLD

By JAMES OTIS. *Kaler*



With Eight Page Illustrations by J. Watson Davis.

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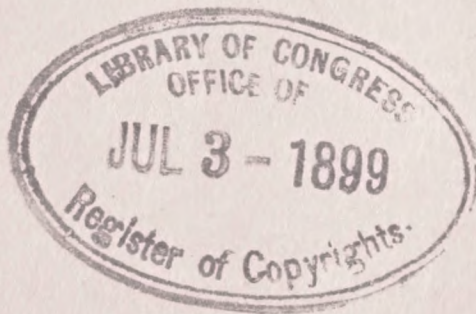
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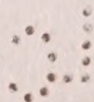
AT THE SIEGE OF HAVANA.

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EXTRACTS.

IN his "History of Connecticut" Trumbull writes concerning the English expedition against Havana in 1762 :

"Lord Albemarle was appointed to command the operations by land. His lordship had been trained to war from his youth, under the command of the Duke of Cumberland. The fleet destined for the service was under the command of Admiral Pocock, who had before commanded with such success in the East Indies. The object of the expedition was Havana. In this centered the whole trade and navigation of the Spanish West Indies. The fleet sailed from Portsmouth on the 5th of March. This was to be reinforced by a squadron from Martinique, under the command of Sir James Douglass. On the twenty-seventh of May two fleets formed a junction at Cape Nichola, the northwest point of Hispaniola. The fleet consisted of thirty-seven ships of war, with nearly an hundred and fifty transports. The land force on board was about ten thousand men. Four

thousand regular troops from New York were ordered to join them at Havana. A considerable number of provincials enlisted under their own officers and served in this arduous enterprise. The whole land force, when collected, would amount to about fifteen or sixteen thousand men."

From Hollister's "History of Connecticut":

"A terrible storm now arose, and the transport that bore Lieutenant-Colonel Putnam, with five hundred men, making one-half of the Connecticut regiment, was driven on a rift of craggy rocks and wrecked. Thus separated from the rest of the fleet, so that he could hope for no aid from any external source, the surf rolling mountain high, and dashing against the sides of the ship with such force that she threatened to part her timbers at every stroke of the sea, this brave officer, looking calmly in the face of death, maintained, above the noise of the waves, a discipline that enabled him to issue all his orders without interruption. . . . In this appalling situation every man who could wield a saw or a hammer was employed in making rafts from spars, planks, and the scanty and scattered material that came to hand. In this way a part of the men were landed at the great risk of being drifted far out into the sea. After a few of the men had been safely

disembarked, ropes were lashed to the rafts, and those who had thus gained the shore, aided in pulling their companions to the beach. Such was the address and caution exercised by Putnam in this most critical of all conditions, that not a man was lost."

From Thomas Mante's "The History of the Late War in America":

"Though a great part of the provisions brought from England had been spoiled by the heat of the climate, the most distressing circumstances of the campaign was the scarcity of water. Of the vast catalogue of human ills, thirst is the most intolerable. On this occasion it soon caused the tongue to swell, extend itself without the lips, and become black as in a state of mortification; then the whole frame became a prey to the most excruciating agonies, till death at length intervened and gave the unhappy sufferer relief. In this way hundreds resigned themselves to eternity. A greater number fell victims to a putrid fever. From the appearance of perfect health, three or four short hours robbed them of existence. Many there were who endured a loathsome disease for days, nay weeks, together. . . ."

AT THE SIEGE OF HAVANA.

CHAPTER I.

YOUNG RECRUITS.

“IT would be a brave venture, Darius Lunt, to enroll our names among those who serve the king in this enterprise, for mayhap both glory and money will be the reward of such as live to come back; but it is the doubt as to whether we might ever see our homes again which makes me timorous.”

“He who goes for a soldier does not speculate upon the chances of death, Robert Clement; but rather says to himself that he above all others is the one not born to be killed on the field of battle.”

“Aye, else his most gracious majesty would find it more difficult to get recruits. Save when you and I went to New York City to see the war vessels, I have never strayed from this town of New Rochelle, and even though there was to be no fighting after

the voyage had come to an end, it would be a perilous venture to journey so far as the island of Cuba, exposed to all the dangers of the sea."

"Now are you bent on searching for bugbears, Robert Clement, and it does not become one whose father served the king here in North America so many years."

"It may be I have not the courage of my father; he was bred, one might almost say, to the profession of arms, and I have ever been tied to my mother's apron-strings because of being the only child."

"It is high time you broke loose from the fetters," Darius Lunt cried with a mocking laugh. "A great hulking lad of seventeen years to be content with spending his days in this miserable little town, when a boy like Nicholas Vallet has already set down his name among those who will serve under General Phineas Lyman!"

"Nicholas is but three months the younger, and I do not count him a child."

"He is nearer one than are you, who sees nothing wrong in being tied to your mother's apron-strings!"

"And why should I? The lad who can feel shame at being held in check by such a mother as is mine, had best be given a few hours in the tread-mill!" Robert cried hotly, and his friend made haste to soothe him by saying:—

“I meant no reproach by my words; but would show you that Nicholas Vallet, who is also an only child, has already set out for a soldier, and by so doing reproaches us, who would loiter here when his most gracious majesty has need of soldiers in this war with Spain. We three—Nicholas, you and myself, are much the same age. I was born in February, you in June, and Nicholas in October of '45. It is now the second day of June in the year 1762; we are seventeen years old, and I say again that the time has come when we should show that we have in us the making of men!”

“All this is very brave, but what if a Spanish bullet find its billet in your body after you had landed in front of Havana? Where then would be the making of a man in you?”

“I should have shown both my spirit and willingness to serve the king when he needed me.”

“The words sound well, Darius, but can you tell me why the king needs you?”

“That is a simple question, Robert Clement. We of the provinces are needed because his gracious majesty is at war with Spain since January of this year.”

“If you are to venture your life it is well you should know why hostilities were begun.”

“Do you think I take no heed to what English-

men are doing? Charles III. of Spain set about giving assistance to our enemies, the French, and that could not be allowed, therefore was the war begun."

"And because their majesties, George III. and Charles III. have a quarrel, you believe we of this province should venture our lives?"

"I had thought you a lad of spirit, Robert Clement, else instead of spending my time in this useless fashion, I would have set down my name as Nicholas Vallet's comrade. It may not be too late now, and I can spare myself the shame of being looked upon as a coward. Already two score of our acquaintances have signed the rolls, and I am not minded to be the last."

Having said this with the air of one who believes he has just cause for complaint, Darius Lunt walked rapidly away in the direction of the village green, and Robert turned his face homeward, sadly disturbed lest, as his friend had intimated, he was laying himself open to the charge of cowardice.

When the news had come to the province that his gracious majesty had declared war against Spain, and it was known that the young men of the colonies in North America would be called upon to join a formidable force under the Earl of Albemarle and Admiral Sir George Pocock to effect the capture of the city of Havana on the island of Cuba,

Robert Clement was at a loss to decide upon the proper course of action. He believed it was necessary he should show his loyalty, yet the thought of leaving his widowed mother was far from pleasant.

With her he had discussed the question again and again, and her reply to all his arguments had been to the effect that she would raise no objection to his enlisting whenever he really believed it his duty to do so, but at the same time she recalled to his mind the fact that her life would be exceedingly lonely and filled with anxiety while her boy was absent from her side, exposed to danger.

It needed not Darius Lunt's words to tell Robert that there were but few among his acquaintances who would disregard the call to arms, and his heart was sore lest he should indeed be looked upon as a coward when it was his mother's grief, rather than Spanish bullets, which caused him fear.

On this day Lieutenant Colonel Israel Putnam, a soldier tried and true, had arrived in town from the Province of Connecticut, in command of a regiment, on his way to New York, and the appearance of these brave recruits had aroused still further the military ardor of the citizens of New Rochelle. Already had Captain Anthony Lispenard and Lieutenant Will Le Conte enlisted nearly an entire company, and there was every reason to believe a full

complement of men would be raised before nightfall; therefore, if Robert counted on serving the king it was necessary he set down his name at once, or the opportunity would be lost.

When he thought of the glory to be won by aiding in the capture of the rich city of Havana, and perhaps a fleet of treasure-laden galleons, he was eager to make all speed toward the tent where Captain Lispenard awaited recruits; and then the thought of his mother was like lead to his feet, preventing him from taking the first step forward.

It was while Robert stood undecided which way to turn that Darius hastened to the green where were gathered, or so it appeared, every man and boy in New Rochelle, and as a new recruit presented himself to the officer on duty, the acclamations which rose on the air served as a spur to those laggards who were mentally counting the cost before taking the king's shilling.

Nicholas Vallet was there looking wondrous proud and brave as he paced to and fro, carrying his father's musket with such a ferocious air that one would have said he believed his single arm was all King George needed with which to settle the dispute between himself and the king of Spain.

Master Vallet so far unbent from his newly acquired dignity as to assume something approaching

his old familiar tones as he asked why Robert had not yet presented himself.

“I do not think we can count on him, Nicholas. He seems to believe it is more necessary to serve his mother than his king —”

“He the same as passed his word to me not longer ago than this day week, and it cannot be he will prove false.”

“Did he promise to enlist?”

“Perhaps not in so many words; but he declared he should do so if his mother so much as said she was willing for him to leave her.”

“And that she will not do, even though he be looked upon as a coward for remaining behind at such a time. Do you know, Nicholas, he the same as admits that he is tied to her apron-strings?”

“Well, an’ why should a lad of spirit be afeered to say what’s much to his credit?” an unfamiliar voice asked, and, turning quickly, the lads saw the slouching form of a man whom they looked upon as old, even though he was hardly more than fifty years of age, who was known to them as “Sergeant Prout.” He had been a soldier during the French war, and served under Colonel Putnam, so it was said, but neither Darius nor Nicholas was positive as to this, for although the old man claimed New Rochelle as his home, he had not been seen in

that town a dozen times since they could remember.

“Why should a decent lad be afeered to say he’s tied to his mother’s apron-strings?” the sergeant asked impatiently as the boys stood gazing at him in silence. “A lad can’t always have his mother with him in this world, an’ the more he sees of her while he’s young, the better it’ll be for him. Who do you thus complain about so foolishly?”

“We spoke of a friend—Robert Clement; but it was not by way of complaint,” Darius made answer, and the sergeant appeared even more interested in the matter as he asked quickly:

“Is it Captain Ezra Clement’s boy?”

“Yes, an’ it please you.”

“I knew Captain Ezra well, an’ so I should, seein’s I served under him at Ticonderoga in ’56, when him as was then Major Putnam was took prisoner by the savages. If the boy inherits his father’s spirit, it mightn’t be well for you lads to call him cowardly.”

“To judge from the red coat you wear, sergeant, one might believe you had enlisted to help bring the island of Cuba under King George’s rule,” Nicholas said pertly, whereat the old man looked at him severely while one might have counted five, and then made reply, speaking gravely:—

“It would be strange if one who had served his majesty these six years should stay at home now when there’s a show for hot work. I came to this settlement that I might sign the rolls in the town I call home.”

“Then if you are needed by the king, why may not Robert Clement’s services be of value? And if an old man ought to leave his fireside, what may be said of the lad who refuses to shoulder a musket?”

“I doubt not but that you are wise in your own conceit, Master Popinjay, and when I’m in need of the wisdom you’ve got stored up in that shallow head, I’ll ask that you turn on the tap. If it so be your courage holds out so long, we shall meet in the trenches before Havana, and then you may have been afflicted with a change of opinion.”

With a soldierly salute such as one comrade might give to another, save for the scornful smile which could be seen beneath the grizzled mustache, Sergeant Prout walked toward that portion of the green where Colonel Putnam was in earnest converse with Captain Lispenard, and Nicholas’ face was of a flaming red hue.

“Some day he shall repent having called me out of my name!” the lad cried passionately. “I care not how old a soldier he be, he has no right to make me the butt of his poor wit!”

“You provoked him somewhat, Nicholas.”

“In what way?”

“First by speaking of him as an old man, mayhap, and then again it appeared by your tone as if the argument you raised could not be answered other than in your way of thinking.”

“And how else might the question be settled? If he believes it his duty to enlist, how can Robert Clement find good reason for staying at home?”

“There might be good and sufficient reasons why neither would be obliged to go for a soldier, and because one does so, the other may not be bounden. But we are wasting our time in this useless converse. I count on signing the rolls this day, whatever Robert may do, and if we dally here some other may deprive me of the opportunity.”

Nicholas was as ready to change the topic of conversation as to show himself among the villagers in the guise of a new recruit, and as the two lads made their way toward the recruiting officer the flush of vexation gradually faded from his face.

Never before had the green of New Rochelle presented such an animated spectacle. There were many in the town who, like Sergeant Prout, had served the king against the French and Indians, and these, almost to a man, were present in uniform, some eager to be counted among those who hoped

to win honors in Cuba, while others were bent only on displaying their fine feathers.

From the country roundabout, men, women and children had gathered to witness the brave sight, and not a few had come simply from curiosity to see the officer from Connecticut who, having been bound to the stake by a savage foe, had so narrowly and miraculously escaped a painful death. Here a family were eating their morning meal, which had been delayed that they might the earlier arrive at the scene of the military display, and there a mother was taking leave of her son whom she had good reason to fear she might never see again.

Some were in the highest state of joyous excitement, while others, having a more vivid remembrance of the late war, were filled with gloomy forebodings because another enemy was added to the list of those who had taken up arms against England. Joy and sorrow went hand-in-hand, and all the while the recruiting officer was adding to his list until the word was passed from mouth to mouth that the company Captain Lispenard had set about raising in New Rochelle was very nearly complete.

Owing to the dense throng Darius Lunt found it difficult to make his way into the tent where the roll lay on the table ready for signing, and Nicholas

was in a fever of excitement lest this comrade on whom he had counted might arrive too late.

There was little cause for such anxiety on his part, however, for when, finally, Darius succeeded in his purpose, there was yet room in the ranks for half a dozen more, and it began to appear as if the recruiting officer had started the rumor regarding the danger of being too late, in order to influence those who were wavering in mind.

On every hand could be heard old soldiers, or citizens who claimed to have more than the ordinary store of knowledge concerning military affairs, discussing the causes of the war, and arguing as to how it might best be carried to a successful conclusion. Some claimed that the king was wise to call upon his provinces in North America for assistance, while others insisted that the colonists could not reasonably be expected to aid in conquering new territory solely for the benefit of the crown; but all united in the belief that the capture of Havana would not be an easy task.

Darius and Nicholas, shortly after the former had set down his name as a new recruit, were brought to a standstill by a press of the throng directly in front of a group of citizens who had been holding converse on the one subject uppermost in the minds of all, and as the boys involuntarily halted one of the

men said as he pointed to a figure some distance away :—

“There is Sergeant Prout. I allow he’s got a better idee of this ’ere business of war than anybody in this town, except it may be Colonel Putnam. Suppose we ask his opinion?”

An answer to this proposition was made by summoning the sergeant, and as he came up the first speaker asked in a deferential tone :—

“What is your idea, sergeant, as to the length of time that will be required for the capturin’ of the Spanish city, after the provincial troops arrive?”

“To my mind it won’t be child’s play, as many seem to believe. I’m allowin’ blood must be spilled in torrents before we make any great headway, an’ in the meanwhile the king’s troops will have to fight against the climate as well as the Spaniards.”

“I’ve been told it was warm an’ comfortable-like in Cuba,” the questioner said with a look of surprise.

“Warm? It’s burnin’ there, an’ we who come from these provinces will wilt under the heat like dew before the sun. Then there’s the fever, that attacks a man so sudden that he may get up in the mornin’ feelin’ chipper, an’ be dead before noon. I’m not sayin’ this to discourage enlistments; but it seems only fair these men should know what may

be expected. Fightin' Injuns is much like harmless sport compared with what we shall find in Cuba. I was there ten years ago, an' know somethin' of what I'm sayin'."

Nicholas gripped his comrade's arm, urging him forward beyond earshot of the speaker as if he did not care to hear more, and Darius asked petulantly :—

"Why did you hasten away? We might have learned much regarding the dangers we are like to encounter."

"I have no care to hear more," and Nicholas' face had suddenly grown pale. "Do you believe what the sergeant said, or did he speak with the idea of frightening some of us?"

"If the last was his purpose he has succeeded so far as you are concerned, of that there can be no doubt; but I am positive he spoke no more than the truth. Sergeant Prout is not given to lying, so I have often heard it said."

"I wish he had given words to his belief early this morning," and Nicholas sighed heavily.

"If he had your name would not be on the rolls of Captain Lispenard's company? Is that your meaning?"

"I am ready to fight the enemies of the king; but I did not count on so doing when even greater

dangers threaten. Now we can understand why Robert Clement had so much care for his mother; he has heard all the sergeant had to say, and does not intend to risk his life an hundred times more than is necessary."

"It may be the captain will let you off even now, if you explain that you were mistaken as to the desire."

"Now you are laughing at me, Darius Lunt, and yet I am tempted to make a try for it. Being a soldier is one matter, and going into a deadly climate where a man may die betwixt morning and noon, as Sergeant Prout tells about, is quite another."

"This is perhaps the only chance you will have to throw up the bargain you made, and I advise that you lose no time in setting about it."

"Will you join me in the request?" Nicholas asked eagerly.

"Not I, because I am not minded to draw back once I have enlisted of my own free will."

Nicholas urged his comrade to follow the example he proposed setting, urging again and again that he had every right to withdraw from a bargain made without a thorough understanding of all the facts in the case; but Darius held firm, and for some moments it appeared as if Nicholas would hold by the act of enlistment rather than show the white

feather. His newly-born fears were stronger, however, than fear of ridicule, and after a brief time of hesitation he went toward the recruiting officer's tent, looking stealthily around to make certain he was not seen by any of his acquaintances.

He had hardly more than set out on this errand when Robert Clement came up, his face flushed as if by exercise, and breathing heavily like one who has run a long distance.

"Is Captain Lispenard's company full yet?" he panted.

"Not yet ; have you decided after all that it was time to show yourself a man ?"

"My mother decided, after hearing how many lads of this town had signed the rolls, that she was willing to part with me, and therefore I am here. Come while I set down my name."

"Wait a bit. Nicholas Vallet was the first to enlist this morning, and now he has gone into the tent to beg off. Perhaps you may change your mind after hearing what Sergeant Prout has said."

Then Darius repeated the old soldier's words, explaining in what light Nicholas viewed the situation, and Robert listened like one who gives little heed to that which is being said.

"Now are you of the same mind about enlisting ?" he asked, his story having come to an end.

“Why should I not be? I did not count on joining the king’s army for my health, and it is to be supposed much danger will be encountered by all.”

“Yet one need not go to Cuba in order to play the part of soldier.”

“It has been said that men are needed there, and he would be a poor stick indeed who waited for a safe opportunity to display his loyalty.”

“Look you, Robert Clement, why did you speak a few hours ago as if you did not wish to serve the king?”

“Did I say that in so many words?”

“No, but yet I believed you had no desire to be a soldier.”

“I could not enlist while my mother was opposed to my so doing, and it was better to seem indifferent to his majesty’s call for men, than to lay on her shoulders the blame. My father was killed in battle, and it is but natural she should grieve to have me encounter the same perils which ended his life. Now, however, she understands—and through no arguments of mine—that it will seem much like cowardice if I hang back when all the other lads are coming forward, therefore her permission has been given right willingly; I am now free to do as I wish. Will you come with me?”

“Ay, Robert Clement, and ask pardon for the harsh speech of the morning. I gave Nicholas the credit of being the bravest ; but it seems you had more courage than he and I together.”

“We will not trouble our heads about what is past, but march side by side like true comrades to meet the foe, each striving to cheer the other, for there must be many times when we shall be inclined to give way to timorousness.”

Darius looked with pride at the friend whom he had so lately misjudged, and the two went forward until they stood at the entrance of the recruiting officer's tent, and saw facing them Nicholas Vallet, red-eyed and trembling, as he cowered before the harsh words which were given in reply to the request that he be allowed to reconsider his determination to become a soldier.

CHAPTER II.

A WOULD-BE DESERTER.

NICHOLAS VALLET'S punishment for having given way to timorousness came to an end when Robert and Darius entered the tent, and he would have beaten a hasty retreat but for the fact that he heard the lad whom he had accused of showing the white feather, ask for permission to sign the rolls.

“Does he know what Sergeant Prout said?” Nicholas asked of Darius in a whisper, and the latter replied in the same cautious tones:—

“Ay, I told him, and he made answer that he was not enlisting for his health. You had sorry fortune with the request to be discharged?”

“Darius, I would rather go to Cuba twice, than listen once more to such a tongue-lashing as that officer gave me. I have only done myself harm by making the proposition, for every man in the company will know that I grew sick of my bargain after having strutted around the green with father's musket on my arm like any simple.”

“You may be certain neither Robert nor I will

speak of it again, and it is not reasonable to suppose the recruiting officer considers the matter of such great importance that he will tell the story."

"But even then I must go with the company!" and the expression of fear on Nicholas' face told better than words could have done of the terror which the future had for him.

Darius was at a loss for a reply, and while he stood gazing pityingly into the face of his timorous friend the brief ceremony of making Robert Clement a member of Captain Lispenard's company had come to an end.

"You are at liberty to spend the time until sunrise to morrow as best pleases you," the red-coated officer said to the new recruit by way of dismissal as he gave him a bright, silver shilling. "Then you will report here in readiness for the march to New York.

Nicholas started in mingled alarm and surprise at this information, and even Robert Clement choked back a sob as he thought of the scanty time remaining in which to make such poor provision for his mother's comfort as was possible; but neither of the lads ventured a reply as they walked slowly out of the tent.

Once in the open air Robert did not linger.

"Since we are to go away in the morning it is

not well for me to loiter here. I will see you two lads before sunrise, if it so be you remain at your homes until I come by on my way to the green."

It was decided that Darius and Nicholas would await the coming of this latest recruit, and the three parted in what was very like sorrowful silence. They no longer dreamed of winning glory on the battle-field; but thought only of the hour so near at hand when what would perhaps be the last farewell on this earth must be spoken to the loved ones.

As a rule the good people of New Rochelle were "early to bed," and a light in a dwelling after nine o'clock in the evening was looked upon by the neighbors as a signal that some member of the family had been stricken by illness. On this night, however, the faint gleam of candles could be seen from nearly every house even until the day broke, for almost every family in the town was making ready to send forth one or more of its members to do the king's bidding.

In the widow Clement's home was being enacted much the same scene as in the other dwellings, save that the good woman did not waste her time in uselessly bewailing the approaching departure. She had been the wife of a soldier, and knew full well it was her duty to repress all signs of sorrow until

after the parting, lest by giving way to grief she should weaken him who must go forth in a manly fashion.

She spoke to Robert only of that which it was essential he should do in camp and on the march in order to preserve his health, and repeated what his father had often said as to the best course for a soldier to pursue so far as taking care of his body was concerned.

When her son would have given words to his sad thoughts, she checked him by saying:—

“A soldier must keep up a brave show of courage, however heavy his heart may be, and it is best to look forward, instead of backward, at such a time as this. God will be with you, as with me, and on none other than Him can we rely. Strive to act the part you have chosen as your father acted his, and be my own true son at all times, however many may be the temptations which assail you.”

Robert flung his arms around the neck of the best friend any boy can ever have, and mayhap the grief in his heart would have overpowered him just then had he not been startled by a quick, sharp knocking at the door, as if the would-be visitor was in exceeding haste.

Passing his hand across his eyes to brush away the least suspicion of moisture, the new recruit

“Don’t make such a mistake as that,” Robert said in a kindly tone, and then, linking arms with the despondent recruit, he drew him a few paces distant from their comrades in order to give some friendly advice.

It seemed useless to plead with the headstrong lad. He had so far allowed his fears to get the better of his judgment that any argument, however sound, had no weight with him. He declared again and again that he would never set sail from New York, and accused his comrades of plotting his death.

“It is of no avail,” Robert whispered to Darius as he finally abandoned the task and fell back by the side of his friend. “He is not in his right mind, and will surely do some mad thing before sufficient time has elapsed to show him that he has magnified the danger.”

“We must see to it that he be kept in the right path, although how it may be possible I am at a loss to say, for it is not likely we can keep him under our eyes all the time.”

Then the loud huzzaing in the distance told that the company had arrived at King’s Bridge, and ten miles lay between them and home.

CHAPTER III.

ON BOARD THE TRANSPORT.

THE enthusiastic welcome accorded the recruits at King's Bridge, where a halt of an hour was made, and from there at every settlement along the line of march, did much toward dispelling the timorousness and forebodings of evil which came over the majority of the newly-enlisted soldiers when they bade adieu to their homes.

The dangers and hardships to be encountered, as pictured by Sergeant Prout, began to diminish, and many of the men threw off all show of depression as the day grew older.

Robert and Darius would have been almost cheerful but for the haggard, reproaching face of the boy who, only a short time previous, had been a most loyal subject of the king's. That Nicholas was enduring most severe mental pain there could be no question, and his terror seemed to increase rather than diminish as the hours wore on.

His comrades, who were in fact playing the part

of guardians, tried in vain to arouse him from the slough of despond into which he had plunged so deeply; but all in vain. The huzzas of the people were to his ears as the knell of doom, and when kindly-disposed citizens praised the lads for showing such a brave spirit as to march with the king's troops, he insisted that their words had a double meaning; that, while they praised, each was really condemning the recruits for being such simples as to march forth to certain death when it was possible to remain at home in security and peace.

Seven miles from King's Bridge the company halted at the Half-Way House, where the Boston stage drew up on each trip for a change of horses, and at five o'clock they were marching down Bowery Lane, near to New York City, with the long journey well-nigh at end.

When the recruits had passed Bayard Street, and before having come to the rope-walks, a mounted messenger met them and delivered to Captain Lisperard a slip of paper, which the latter scrutinized carefully, immediately afterward giving the order to "close up in the ranks."

"Try to *look* like soldiers, even though you *are* prone to make such geese of yourselves," he said impatiently, as the men straggled here and there in even more awkward fashion than before the com-

mand was given. "Surely you can walk side by side, with even step, if it be not possible to carry your muskets properly."

"Somethin' more'n words will be needed before this crew is licked into shape," Sergeant Prout said with a laugh, and then he directed the boys to range themselves on either side of him, copying his every movement.

"Did that messenger bring news to Captain Lisperard concerning the war, think you?" Darius asked curiously, and again the old soldier laughed.

"News of the war to an officer no higher in rank than a captain? It was some order regardin' our movements—most likely namin' the place of encampment, for now that we serve the king it is for his servants to see that we have both food and shelter."

Nicholas did not apparently give any heed to the direction the company was taking; but all the others looked forward eagerly, for it was well known that several days must necessarily be spent in New York, even though no attempt at drilling the men was made, and they hoped the camp assigned them would be in a pleasant location.

"We're headin' for the common," Sergeant Prout said when they were come by the tan-yards, hard by the Negros' burial-grounds, "and these young sprigs

opened the door, and saw Darius Lunt standing before him.

“It is not yet sunrise!” Robert exclaimed, thinking only that his friend had come to summon him to the rendezvous, and before he could say more Darius had stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

“Nicholas has it in his mind to run away!” the visitor cried, his heavy breathing telling of the pace at which he had been traveling.

“But that he cannot do, having once set down his name on the rolls!” Robert exclaimed, not fully understanding the purport of the information, and the widow Clement uttered a low cry of dismay.

“He declares he will never march with the company; that he was deceived as to the dangers, and, therefore, cannot be held to his word. He came to me not a quarter of an hour ago, and was then about to go into hiding——”

“It would be no less than desertion!” Mrs. Clement exclaimed, and Robert cried in deepest concern:—

“The village and every one in it would be disgraced if he should make any such attempt!”

“Ay, but how may he be restrained? He has promised to remain quietly at my home until I have spoken with you, and mother is keeping guard over him. I am certain he will take to his heels before

day breaks, despite all I may say or do, unless I give Captain Lispenard warning, and that could be little less than sending the lad to prison, for of a surety he would be punished severely."

"Does he know that a deserter is shot if he be captured?" the widow asked in a tearful voice.

"Ay, Mistress Clement, so my mother told him; but he declares that with a start of two hours he can get well away where none of the king's soldiers may ever lay hands on him."

"And by so doing exile himself! The lad must be mad!"

"So he is—mad with terror," Darius replied with a sigh. "His mother thinks him in bed, otherwise I am certain she would have kept fast hold upon the coward, for the Lunts are not people who would sit quietly by and see themselves disgraced."

"Why did you not go directly to his home, instead of coming here?"

"Because I was forced to promise I would not have speech with his people, else had he taken his departure at once."

"I will speak to his mother, and without wasting more time," Robert said decidedly as he moved towards the door. "This disgrace shall not come upon the village if I can prevent it! It would even be better to inform Captain Lispenard, than to allow

it to be said a lad from New Rochelle had proven himself a rank coward."

Before Robert could carry his intention into effect Mistress Clement laid her hand on his arm, as she asked : —

"Do you know a certain Sergeant Prout who served under your father? He is in this town, and has enlisted in Captain Lispenard's company. That much I know because he called here during the afternoon to pay his respects to the widow of his old commander."

"I have seen and had speech with him," Darius replied before his comrade could speak.

"Go to him at once; he is an old soldier, and will take charge of the matter more mercifully, perhaps, than would your captain. Say that I implore him to aid the unfortunate lad."

"But where may we find him at this hour of the night? I am not certain he yet remains in town," and Darius looked perplexed.

"He was at the inn; go there at once lest Nicholas forget his promise and flee."

The boys needed no urging; even though their friend was showing himself so cowardly, they were disposed to do all in their power to save him from himself, and anxiety, lest they be too late, lent wings to their feet.

The sergeant was at the inn asleep; but an old soldier is quickly aroused, and soon the bearers of ill-tidings had speech with him.

“Counts on desertin’, eh?” Sergeant Prout said in a matter-of-fact tone when the story had been told hurriedly. “The lad who binds himself without having first counted all the cost is little less than a fool, but even a fool may be saved from his folly if the proper remedy be applied. I am not disposed to lose a good night’s rest in behalf of a coward, though I’m ready to give advice, if that’s what you’re wantin’.”

“Mistress Clement bade us say that she implored you to aid Nicholas!” Darius cried when the sergeant settled back on the pillow as if to resume his interrupted slumbers.

“Mistress Clement did you say?” and the old soldier sat upright once more.

“Ay, sir, and here is her son Robert, who this day enlisted in Captain Lispenard’s company,” Darius rejoined as he pushed his comrade foward.

In a twinkle Sergeant Prout had Robert by the hand, and was apparently on the point of speaking in a complimentary strain when the lad checked him.

“I crave your pardon, sir, but time presses if we would save Nicholas from his own fears. He remains

unwillingly at Darius' home, and may at any moment so far forget his promise as to flee."

"What would you have me do?" the old soldier asked thoughtfully.

"Whatever may seem best to you, sir, so that Nicholas is restrained from deserting."

"It ill befits an honest man to run after a coward, but since my old captain's wife has given the command it must be done," Sergeant Prout said grumblingly as he made ready to venture out. "You shall turn the lad over to my keepin', an' I'll answer for it he marches with his company at sunrise."

"But surely you will give him the opportunity to bid his mother good-by?" Robert asked solicitously.

"Mistress Clement sent no such orders."

"She would have done so of a verity, had she believed it necessary, for the mother should not be punished however great a coward the son may be, and Mistress Vallet is a good woman."

"Well an' fair, my lad. I will see to it that all is done in proper fashion, an' after deliverin' the young scapegrace up to me you two shall bottle up sleep against the march of to-morrow. The first lesson a raw recruit should learn is to care for his body, and he is guilty who neglects to slumber when a favorin' opportunity presents itself. What with

the sorrow of partin' from parents, which must come to every decent lad who journeys from home, and the excitement of the day, you'll be in no fit condition to play the soldier when day breaks, unless some rest has been had."

"We will faithfully do whatever you may command, sir, so that Nicholas is saved from himself," Robert replied heartily, and no further converse was indulged in until the three stood before the door of Darius' home.

"Show the way in, an' leave all else to me," Sergeant Prout said stiffly, and Darius obeyed.

Robert shrank from presenting himself at such a time, and since his services were not needed he hastened away as soon as his companions crossed the threshold.

When Captain Lispenard's company set out for New York next morning, a full hour later than the time appointed, there were many sad-faced lads in the ranks, but not one so downhearted and despairing as Nicholas Vallet.

He marched by the side of Sergeant Prout, much as a prisoner might accompany his keeper, and spoke never a word to his friends.

Neither Robert nor Darius knew what had passed between the two after they left Master Lunt's home the night previous. When he entered the dwelling

the old soldier accosted the lad harshly, and allowed him to understand he was a prisoner; but made no remark relative to his cowardice in the presence of others.

How or where the would-be deserter passed the remainder of the night, the lads who had saved him from himself did not know; but Darius was inclined to the belief that Nicholas had been forced to lodge with the sergeant.

A motley throng was this company under the command of Captain Anthony Lispenard, and save for the fact that each member carried a weapon of some kind, a spectator would have been at loss to say with what intent these men and boys were trooping along the Boston Road in the direction of New York.

A dozen or more of the rank and file wore uniforms bearing marks of rough usage, as in the case of Sergeant Prout, and the captain and his two lieutenants were clad in red coats, with swords dangling by their sides; but the remainder of the force yet retained the garb of civilians. There was a semblance of military formation, however, as the raw recruits marched past the meeting-house, where were gathered nearly all the inhabitants of the town to bid them God-speed.

More than one of the men, and the greater number

of the lads, furtively brushed tear-drops from their eyes as they responded by a wave of the hand or an inclination of the head to words of adieu from those who were to be left behind, in many cases forever, and all, despite the fact that Captain Anthony cried loudly and often : " Eyes right ! " turned their heads for a last glimpse of the loved ones, until the trend of the road shut out from view the sorrowful throng.

The younger boys of the town, charmed by the notes of fife and drum, accompanied the recruits a goodly portion of the way to East Chester, for the line of march was to be along the Boston Road, and when this following turned back it was to the newly-made soldiers of the king as if the last bond which held them to their native town was broken.

Although the long journey had but just been begun, it seemed as if New Rochelle was already far away, and those who could do so in a steady voice, for many there were who would have burst into tears with the first attempt to speak, began to discuss the probable duration of the voyage to Cuba, or the result of a siege of Havana.

Sergeant Prout and one man who marched in the front rank, were the only members of the company who had ever visited the island they were setting forth to conquer, and these two were called upon for such information as it was possible to give.

The old soldier, who was yet keeping close guard over Nicholas Vallet, believing it was well his companions-in-arms should know fully all the difficulties in the path, lest on receiving a sudden check they grow downhearted, spoke plainly of the dangers and suffering to be encountered. He made light of possible perils by sea; but described Morro Castle, which fortification must be stormed before Havana could be captured, and recalled to mind Spanish deeds of valor in the past, as proof that the English army would find in the defenders of the city a foe not to be despised.

When he had dwelt upon this last fact with what many believed to be unnecessary length, a recruit in the rear rank shouted:

“To hear you hold forth in praise of the Spanish one might think you did not believe King George’s men could best them!”

“It was not my purpose to give the words such colorin’,” the sergeant replied promptly; “but I would have you realize all which lays before us. In my day I have seen men set out over confident in their own strength, believing that the task before them was a simple one, and when unexpected difficulties arose those same bold fellows would break down in sheer despair while more timorous comrades held stoutly to the task. If a danger be thoroughly

known it is half overcome, and those who anticipate the work to be more difficult than really is the case, can the better meet a lesser peril. We must not only fight against the Spaniards, but the climate, and both can be done successfully, please God, if we go prepared."

There were a few in the ranks who recognized the force of the sergeant's argument; but the majority were not well pleased with the pictures he drew, and when he ceased speaking no one cared to question him further.

All conversation ceased, and the recruits plodded on in silence, each, perhaps, growing more uncomfortable in mind as he left home further behind him.

After the first greetings, when they met on the green in front of the meeting-house at New Rochelle, neither Robert nor Darius had spoken; before the mental vision of each was the picture of his mother as she bravely strove to repress her tears lest he should grow disheartened, and at such a time conversation was distasteful.

When an hour had passed the company entered the settlement of East Chester, and the greetings of the inhabitants were doubly pleasing because they served to distract painful thoughts.

Here a brief halt was called. From Shute's tavern cakes and ale were served, and such refreshment was

welcome to many whose grief had prevented them from partaking of the morning meal at home.

Four miles, or one-sixth of the distance to New York, had been traversed, and the recruits were getting warmed up to their work.

When East Chester was left behind, and the acclamations of the inhabitants could no longer be heard, the men seemed to have shaken off the first attack of heart-sickness, and, plodding forward without any attempt at military formation, each selecting his comrade, they grew almost merry as the hours wore on.

Sergeant Prout and Nicholas joined Robert and Darius, the four marching well in advance, and, for the first time that morning the lad who would have brought disgrace upon himself and those who loved him, spoke to his comrades.

He was not in a friendly mood, however, as could be told by his actions as well as his words.

“If I never see home again you two will be responsible for my death,” he said in a threatening tone, and the sergeant replied gravely, although the remark had not been addressed to him:—

“They would have been responsible had they stood idly by and allowed you to bring disgrace upon all concerned. When older grown you will understand that there are many things worse than death, my lad.”

“It would seem as if I had already heard enough of your preaching,” Nicholas said sharply. “You who had no right, have treated me as if I was a slave or a criminal, and I will be put upon no longer.”

“Some day you will thank the sergeant for what he did last night,” Robert said in what he intended should be a soothing tone; but Nicholas was not in a mood to listen to wisdom.

“When that time comes I will be in my dotage; but don’t think I shall allow myself to be dragged away like a lamb to the slaughter. We have not yet embarked.”

“Are you still thinking of deserting?” Robert asked in surprise. “It is hardly more than four-and-twenty hours since you were so eager to sign the rolls that you could hardly wait for the recruiting officer to make his appearance.”

“That was before I knew what dangers threatened. Now I am better informed, wild horses couldn’t drag me to the Spanish island.”

“A squad of soldiers will march you out some fine morning, and leave you behind them with half a dozen bullets in your body, if you attempt to desert,” the sergeant interrupted sharply.

“That can’t be done until I have been caught, and it won’t be a hard task to keep out of the way so long as I please.”

may rest content, since we shall be well within the city."

"Have you been here often?" Robert asked timidly, and the old soldier appeared to see something comical in the question.

"Often? I know this city better than I do the town I call my home, and if there is any quarter which may be strange to you, lads——"

"Neither Darius nor I were ever so far from New Rochelle as this, save once, when we came here to see the war-vessels, but were allowed to remain no longer than two hours," Robert replied, as he gazed around him in delighted surprise.

"Then, if it so be we are not sent away too soon, you lads shall see rare sights, an' Nicholas may have his full share if he will give over his doleful thoughts and take advantage of the present, as a good soldier should."

"One who goes to death cannot find it in his heart to be merry," was the mournful reply, delivered with such a long-drawn sigh that Darius did not attempt to control his laughter, and Robert had difficulty in keeping his face straight.

"Death will come no nearer because you are cheerful," the sergeant said impatiently. "He who anticipates trouble suffers twice. Here is the word that tells us where we are to be encamped!"

At that moment the captain gave the command: "Left wheel," and the New Rochelle recruits marched on to the common, midway between the powder-house and Kentry's potbaking works, where there was a row of empty white tents amid a veritable town of similar dwellings.

To the lads who had never before seen a military encampment, it seemed as if tents for full ten thousand men had been set up on this common, and troops were even quartered in and around the poor-house, as could be seen by Captain Lispenard's men when they were allowed to break ranks.

After the march of twenty-eight miles the three boys whom Sergeant Prout looked upon as in his charge, had no inclination to indulge in sight-seeing. As soon as might be after rations were served, all three stretched themselves on the ground within the tent assigned them, and but little time was spent in wakefulness.

Early on the following morning the drill masters took the new recruits in hand, and during the entire forenoon the members of Captain Lispenard's company, save those who had previously served in the army, were kept busily at work learning the manual of arms.

Nicholas Vallet obeyed the orders of the officers in so far as he was able; but his comrades under-

stood full well from the expression on his face that he was no nearer being content with his lot than he had been.

While they were yet eating breakfast on that first morning the sergeant had found opportunity of warning Robert and Darius to keep close watch over their friend.

“Not that I’m afeered he’ll make any attempt to give us the slip durin’ the daytime,” the old soldier added; “but he may form the acquaintance of turbulent characters in the town, with the idea of gettin’ such as they to aid him, and that we must guard against. Until we are safely on board the transport, one or the other of us three will keep him well in view.”

“How long are we like to stay here?” Darius asked.

“Not above three or four days, if all I’ve heard this mornin’ be true, an’ surely durin’ such time we can see to it that the timorous one doesn’t get away.”

Therefore it was that Robert and Darius kept strict watch of their friend during the wearisome work of the forenoon, and when the tired recruits were dismissed from the ranks these two took good care Nicholas should be in their immediate vicinity.

Since one day was much like another during the

eight that the New Rochelle recruits remained encamped on New York common, it is not well to make any attempt at describing what was done by them every hour, lest both reader and writer become wearied with the monotony of such an uneventful life.

Every forenoon from seven o'clock until twelve the men were kept industriously at work learning the drill, but on such afternoons as Captain Lispenard gave them permission to go into the city, the three comrades, accompanied by Sergeant Prout, spent the time in sight-seeing.

They visited Trinity church, founded in 1696, and standing "on the banks of the Hudson, with a large cemetery open on each side, and enclosed in front by a painted paled fence." They inspected Fly Market on Burgher's Path,* and wandered among the farmers' wagons laden with produce, which were on the public stand in Broad Street. They watched without envy the fine ladies who drove through the streets attended by negro coachmen and footmen, and looked in at several of the shops which seemed to them veritable palaces filled with the most costly wares.

Sergeant Prout treated them to a dinner at the Duke of Cumberland tavern, opposite the Merchants'

* Now Old Slip.

Coffee House, and there, as Robert wrote to his mother, "they had many strange and curious things to eat, all brought on by servants in as goodly a fashion as if we four had been of the king's family."

On one evening the old soldier invited them to accompany him to "Mr. Holt's Long Room" on Broadway, where they saw a most amusing entertainment entitled the "Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch, or the Spaniard Tricked," and Darius declared that the remembrance of the performance would be ample payment for all the suffering which might come to him on the island of Cuba, for never before had he seen such wonderful actions."

During all this round of sight-seeing and labor of drilling, Nicholas remained in much the same frame of mind as on the morning he left home. At times, it is true, he would seem to forget his anxiety concerning the future in his admiration of this new world which had so suddenly been opened before him; but immediately he returned to the encampment all his gloomy forebodings came upon him.

Then dawned the day, the 10th of June, when word was passed from one to another that this great army, numbering nearly twenty-three hundred men, would be embarked on the morrow for the voyage

to that island which was to be wrested from the Spaniards.

When such information came to his ears Nicholas was plunged into a gloomy revery, and he shunned his comrades so far as possible by remaining on the opposite side of the common, where was stored a portion of the supplies intended to be put on board the transports.

“There is no need to follow him, lad,” Sergeant Prout said, when Robert made a movement as if to leave the tent. “I’ll answer for it that double the usual number of guards have been put on duty, and no one can get beyond the lines without a pass.”

“Why should we trouble our heads concerning him?” Darius asked impatiently. “I have grown weary with seeing the kill-joy mooning around. If he is bent on deserting, and it seems certain such is the case, else he would not have held to it these seven days, why not give him his will, and have done with it?”

“Because we are his friends,” Robert replied promptly. “Never before has he given us reason to complain, and we should be able to bear with him until this strange mood passes away.”

“If he can hold to it during seven days without showing signs of growing more respectable, who shall say if he ever will recover?”

“I claim that it is our duty to struggle with him until the last. It may be that after we have arrived at the island, and he learns the idleness of his fears, we shall see him the same comrade as before this strange malady overtook him.”

“Malady indeed! I call it sheer wilfulness!” and then Darius dismissed the matter from his mind by asking the sergeant concerning the probable length of the voyage before them.

There were many wakeful ones in the encampment during this last night the soldiers were to spend in their native province, until after many dangers had been encountered, and, so far as his tent-mates knew, Nicholas did not once seek the shelter of the camp.

Twice during the hours of darkness Robert would have gone in search of him if the sergeant had not sternly forbade his doing anything of the kind, but when morning came he was early astir, fearful lest the lad might have found an opportunity of slipping across the guard-lines.

Nicholas presented himself when the rations were served, however, but refused to enter into conversation, and after several fruitless efforts his comrades gave over the attempt to gain his confidence.

Within an hour after the sun had risen the troops were in motion, marching down Broadway to White-

hall Slip, off which the transports were lying, but it was past noon before all were embarked.

During this time of waiting it was as if the officers believed that more than Nicholas might be minded to escape from the service which they had voluntarily entered, for the men were kept rigorously in line, and guards placed on both sides the street to prevent any from leaving the ranks.

The name of the transport to which the men from New Rochelle were assigned was the Golden Pippin, and, much to the surprise of all they were to journey with a portion of the recruits from Connecticut, instead of in the company of the troops from their own province.

It was afterward learned that there were eight hundred volunteers from New York, and since but five hundred could take passage on one transport, the remaining three hundred were distributed among such vessels as lacked a full complement.

On board the Golden Pippin, in addition to Captain Lispenard's company, were four hundred men from Connecticut, and this portion of the expedition was under command of Lieutenant-colonel Israel Putnam.

When all were embarked it was said that the entire force was made up of five hundred recruits from New Jersey, eight hundred from New York,

and upwards of one thousand from Connecticut. General Phineas Lyman was in command of the provincial troops, and it was understood he would retain such rank after arriving at Cuba, being subordinate, as a matter of course, to the Earl of Albemarle.

The Golden Pippin was a ship of only about three hundred tons burthen, and therefore, the recruits found themselves confined to exceedingly limited quarters.

Old soldier as he was, and having had considerable experience on board troop-ships, Sergeant Prout lost no time, while the majority of the men were watching the fleet as it got under way, in selecting for himself and those men whom he had taken under his immediate charge the most desirable of the bunks built between decks.

Thus it was that the boys were quartered amidships, where the action of the vessel would be less than in the bow, and directly under the main hatch, where they might have full benefit of the fresh air from that opening.

The bunks were shelf-like structures, with a narrow board at the outer edge to prevent the occupants from being thrown out when the ship labored in a heavy sea, and each was sufficiently large to permit of four men lying at full length.

“Are all of us to sleep in that little place?” Darius asked when, the fleet under way, the lads had come in search of the sergeant.

“Ay, that you are, and but for me your quarters would have been even smaller. Look around a bit, and you’ll understand that we’ve taken the cream of the milk. In fine weather we’ll have plenty of fresh air, and when the sea kicks up a bobbery there’ll be less knocking about here than elsewhere.”

Robert gazed in dismay at the bunk with its scanty bed of loose straw, and Nicholas cried peevishly :

“I can’t sleep there! I’d throw myself overboard first!”

“Very well, lad, you’re at liberty to do that if it seems best, an’ I’ll engage not to raise a hand against it. When you talked of desertin’ I was bound to prevent it because of the disgrace you’d bring on all that called themselves your friends; but drownin’ yourself is another matter, an’ whenever you go over the rail we’ll have more room to spare in the bunk.”

Robert started up in alarm as if afraid Nicholas would carry out his threat at once; but Darius, by gestures, urged him to remain silent, and there was no movement made by the dissatisfied recruit to show that he had any real idea of putting an end to himself.

An hour later, when all four were on deck watching the progress of the ship as she made her way slowly out of the harbor, the old soldier found an opportunity to whisper to Robert : —

“ We’ve coddled that little wretch as long as is needed. Now he’s where desertin’ ain’t an easy matter, an’ I’m countin’ on straightenin’ him out with a round turn.”

“ But it would be terrible, sergeant, if he should kill himself ! ”

“ Don’t be afeered anything of that kind will happen, lad ; he’s too much of a coward to try it. The main trouble is that he’s bent on makin’ matters disagreeable for all hands, if it so be he can, an’ I’m determined he shan’t succeed, so keep hold of your tongue if you happen to hear me give him a good dressin’ down.”

Robert might have made some protest against the employment of harsh measures, if at that moment the ship had not begun to behave in such a disagreeable fashion as to give him a most uncomfortable sensation in the region of his stomach.

The Golden Pippin had left the placid surface of the harbor, and was curtseying to the swell of the ocean, at the same time rolling from side to side much to the distress of those recruits who had never before been on salt water.

“I’m feeling sick,” Darius gasped. “Does the fever ever come to a lad as soon as this?”

The old soldier laughed long and loud at this question, and by the time his mirth had subsided all three of his recruits were pale-faced and silent, exhibiting every symptom of illness.

From that moment until eight and forty hours had passed the boys gave little heed to what was passing on round them, save that they were fully sensible of every upward rush and downward plunge which the ship made. There was no longer in Nicholas’ mind any thought of deserting or committing suicide ; he only longed most fervently for home and mother.

Those of the men who were not ill would have amused themselves at the expense of the sick lads, but to this kind of sport Sergeant Prout put an end before it was well begun, and there were few private soldiers on board the Golden Pippin who dared run counter to the old man’s wishes, because of his well-known strength and agility.

Thus it was the three lads were left in peace, while others, less favored by a comrade, were woefully worried and harassed by rough companions, and although each of them had been fully convinced theirs was a mortal illness, they presented themselves for rations on the third morning after leaving port.

The tribute which they had paid to the ocean was of real benefit, and once having recovered, they were revived both in body and mind to such a degree as to be able to see something of interest in everything around them.

During a week after leaving New York the transports kept well together under convoy of the war vessels, and a beautiful spectacle it was to see the trim craft sailing peacefully along so nearly in company that a circle of two miles in diameter would have enclosed them all, while on the outside, watchful and wary, the big men-of-war stood hither and thither on the alert for any sign of danger.

Until the morning of the twentieth day the fleet had been favored with gentle winds and a cloudless sky; perhaps the sailors would have been better pleased with heavier weather, so that they might reach their destination sooner, but the soldiers were well content to thus loiter along, for once anchor was cast off the coast of Cuba the serious work would begin for them.

On the morning of July 1st those who went on deck saw the sky covered with low-hanging, threatening clouds; the sun was obscured, and the waves curled high and ominously, as if gathering force to show the provincial recruits what power was in their wrath.

“It’ll be a dirty day, an’ we shall be fortunate if the hatches are not battened down before sunset,” the sergeant said to the lads, and they wondered what he meant by the adjective “dirty,” until he explained that it was a sailor’s term for disagreeable weather.

Before noon came the Golden Pippin was plunging about so wildly that none save the seamen could keep their feet, and the soldiers in their narrow quarters were shrouded in densest gloom, for all the hatches had been closed to prevent the waves, which broke over the ship at short intervals, from flooding the hold.

There was something inexpressibly horrible in thus being deprived of light, and literally imprisoned where the air was soon rendered most foul. On deck they could have witnessed the ship’s struggle against the tempest, and known that she was making a brave fight; but being thus shut up, with no possibility of knowing what was being done, and feeling more sensibly every wild pitch and sickening lurch of the fabric, it was as if at each plunge into the abyss of waters she was bent on going to the bottom.

Sergeant Prout did his best to allay the fears of the boys whom he had taken in charge; but there were so many everywhere around who gave words

to the terrors which assailed them, such an uproar throughout the entire hold, that what he said was lost amid the confusion of creaking timbers, pounding waves and cries of the frightened recruits.

It was a most horrible experience which had not come to an end when four-and-twenty hours had past, but, on the contrary, the tempest apparently increased in violence, and Nicholas entirely forgot his fears of the future in the peril which menaced.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRECK.

ON the first morning of the storm rations were served to the soldiers, but from that time until noon of the third day no attempt was made to provide for their necessities, and those who were least alarmed began what was very like a mutiny.

“The officers are sitting in the cabin eating their fill, while we are shut in here to starve!” one of the bolder spirits shouted to his fellows. “Was it for such treatment as this that we enlisted?”

“Have a care, my fine lad!” Sergeant Prout cried warningly. “The word ‘mutiny’ has an ugly ring in the ears of honest men, and there is a punishment for such actions which makes a little hunger appear like veriest pleasure.”

“Hold your tongue, coward, I was only speaking to men of spirit!”

For a moment Robert believed the old soldier was about to spring upon the fellow who had in-

sulted him, even though the darkness was so dense as to render it impossible for one man to single out another save by the sound of his voice.

The sergeant, who had been lying in his bunk because of his inability to stand erect while the ship was tossing about so wildly, had risen to a sitting posture, but after a moment's reflection he stretched out at full length again, crying for the benefit of his unseen enemy:—

“Those who would not dare own to their words in the daylight, are wondrous brave when the darkness hides them.”

“You had best keep your tongue where it belongs until some one speaks to you!” the mutineer continued threateningly, and then addressing all within sound of his voice, he cried: “Who will come with me and demand fair treatment?”

“Where are you going?”

“On deck, and from thence to the cabin, where he who calls himself the colonel in command of this troop, shall hear what I have to say!”

During an instant no one made reply, and then the sergeant said with a mocking laugh:—

“I allow that won't be done till the hatches have been taken off! You're as fast here as if in prison, unless it so be you can make your way through the bulkhead.”

“And that’s what we will do!” the first speaker cried, as if these words had given him the idea he needed. “Let all who are not willing to be starved like dogs, follow me!”

The boys understood, rather than saw, that several men from their immediate vicinity were crawling or tumbling out of their bunks, rolling here and there as the ship lurched or pitched, and then came a cry:—

“Bring a musket or two this way! If we can’t force a passage through these timbers, we can at least let the skulking officers know we’re ready for mischief.”

“Here is what you want, and ammunition to go with it,” a voice shouted, and the words were followed by a heavy blow, telling that a weapon had been hurled across the deck.

“This is gettin’ serious,” the boys heard Sergeant Prout mutter, as he slipped over the edge of the bunk, holding himself partially steady by clutching with both hands the edge of the bed. Then raising his voice to its full pitch, he cried: “Have a care what you are doin’, men, have a care! Don’t be led by a lunatic into mischief that may cost your lives! In such a gale as this it is well-nigh impossible to serve rations, an’ I have no doubt but that the officers are as hungry as we, even though they be in the cabin.”

“Have no fear for them; they live in luxury while we’re herded here like cattle, with not so much as a sup to drink,” the man who had started the mutiny replied.

“There’s water in plenty,” Sergeant Prout continued, “an’ since your own good sense must tell you that rations cannot be served in the midst of such a tempest, he is a wise man who holds his peace and commends his soul to God, for who may say how long the ship can stagger under the heavy blows that are bein’ dealt her by the waves?”

The old soldier might as well have addressed himself to those same waves of which he spoke, with the hope of stilling them, as to appeal to the few, made bolder because they were unseen, who were bent on making mischief.

It was all in vain that he begged and implored the men to remember how much such a move might cost them, or that he represented again and again what all knew to be the truth, that it was impossible to serve food at such a time.

He was yet shouting at the full strength of his lungs, while clutching the edge of the bunk to prevent himself from being overthrown, when a sharp report rang out on the foul, confined air, and as the sulphurous fumes seemed to fill every inch of the space between-decks, a voice shouted:—

“If that don’t give ’em a good idea of where we are, try another shot!”

“Can’t you understand that it is impossible for any who are aft to get in here? And if those on deck should make the attempt, we’d be drowned out!” a man whose bunk adjoined the one occupied by the boys, cried.

“You’re both a fool and a liar!” came from the darkness aft. “Here’s a door in the bulk-head, and if we can’t burst through, we’ll at least send a few bullets into the cabin!”

Again the musket was discharged, and at the same instant the mutineers who had crawled aft set up a howl of rage and defiance.

“If that don’t wake ’em up we’ll fire a volley——”

The sentence was not concluded, for suddenly the door to which the previous speaker had referred, was opened, and the rays of a lantern revealed a dark form on the threshold.

“What is being done here?” a stern voice asked, and all understood that Colonel Putnam was confronting them.

“I reckon they’ll know now the meanin’ of the word, mutiny,” the boys heard Sergeant Prout mutter, and then the commander spoke again:—

“What was the cause of that firing?”

While one might have counted ten all was silent



“Suddenly the door was opened and the rays of a lantern revealed Colonel Putnam on the threshold.”—Page 58.

At the Siege of Havana.

save for the creaking of timbers and the thunder of the waves against the ship's hull, and then some one replied hesitatingly:—

“We're starvin' in here, to say nothin' of bein' nigh choked to death.”

“And do you think any one on board this ship is taking his ease? Have you so little sense as not to understand that even the crew, upon whose exertions our lives depend, have been without food these two days?”

“There is plenty in the ship.”

“Ay, and if you're not drowned before, you shall have it in abundance as soon as the tempest abates. What are you men doing aft here?” he added, flashing the light of the lantern upon the group of mutineers who had gathered near the bulkhead. “Give me that musket!”

“I shall need it to save myself from being starved to death,” the voice of the man who was responsible for the outbreak replied.

The three boys craned their heads over the edge of the bunk in order to see what was going on, and as they did so two other officers, each with a lantern appeared just behind the colonel.

“Where are the old soldiers who have served under me?” Israel Putnam cried, and he stepped forward without hesitation, even though knowing

the men were armed and ready for mischief. "Sergeant Prout, I can depend upon it that you are not mixed up in this disgraceful proceeding."

"Indeed you can, sir," the old soldier replied emphatically.

"Can you come at your musket handily?"

"Ay, sir."

"Load and fire into this clump of mutinous hounds as soon as may be. See to it that your bullet finds at least one target!"

The colonel stepped yet further forward, holding the lantern high above his head that the sergeant might see to take aim, and those who had followed him did the same.

The three boys literally held their breath in suspense. They felt positive some of the mutineers would shoot the officer down as he stood there apparently unarmed, and even though they should withhold their fire, murderous work would be done as soon as the sergeant discharged his musket, for there had been many near about who encouraged the leaders in the outbreak.

The old soldier was obeying the order as rapidly as possible, but it was not an easy matter to load the musket while the ship was almost on her beam-ends at one moment, and then plunging her bow down until the deck was at an angle of forty-five

degrees before one had time to guard against the first motion.

“Are you ready, sergeant?” Colonel Putnam shouted impatiently.

“Very nearly, sir; but it’s slow work in this ’ere unsteady place.”

“Would you murder us in cold blood?” one of the mutineers cried in evident alarm.

“It won’t be a case of murder, but simply a method of enforcing obedience.”

“What do you want us to do, sir?” and the question was asked hurriedly as if the speaker was afraid the sergeant would obey orders before a reply could be made.

“I commanded you to deliver up your musket, and my orders are never repeated when once understood.”

“All ready, sir! If you’ll hold that ’ere lantern a bit higher I can pick off my man when the ship rights a bit,” Sergeant Prout cried in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he was accustomed to such work.

“Here’s the musket, sir,” the mutineer who had previously been so bold, cried imploringly. “In pity’s name don’t murder us in cold blood!”

Others joined in the appeal for mercy, and the colonel cried:—

“Hold your fire, sergeant; but stand ready to shoot at the first word, if these men show further

inclination to be thick-headed. Captain Lispenard, do you take down the names of the mutinous ones, after you have disarmed them, and when we have the opportunity I will see that they fully understand the meaning of military discipline." Then raising his voice as he turned towards the bow the colonel continued, "To such of you as have refrained from joining in this mutiny, I say that if there was any possible remedy you should not suffer as I know you must be doing. It is necessary we of the army remain below at such a time as this, lest by our presence on deck we hamper the seamen in their work. I assure you that rations were dealt out to all when last I had bite or sup, and my hunger shall not be appeased until you have food in plenty."

Then Israel Putnam turned toward Captain Lispenard, who was disarming the men and at the same time writing down their names.

This task occupied many moments because of the difficulty in moving about while the ship's movements were so violent, and when it was finished the colonel cried :—

"Sergeant Prout, bring hither two or three men in whom you can rely, and remain on guard at this door. Should any others of the troop show a desire to mutiny, you will fire a volley into their midst, even at the risk of injuring innocent men, and then

notify me. You may have a lantern, but it must be guarded with the most jealous care, for if fire were to be added to the other dangers which beset us, not a man aboard the Golden Pippin would live to tell the tale."

"You lads will take your muskets an' follow me," the sergeant said, as he made ready to obey the order. "It may be a bit more comfortable near the bulk-head door, for we should be able to get more of fresh air than is possible here."

Each musket had been left in charge of him who claimed it, when the troops came on board, and the majority of the men had stowed the weapons in their bunks. The three lads and Sergeant Prout had followed such example, therefore the boys were ready to obey orders as soon as they scrambled out of the poor apology for a bed.

It was by no means a simple matter to make their way aft while hampered with the weapons. To walk erect was out of the question, and even as they crawled along the deck there was every danger of being hurled from one side of the ship to the other.

In addition to this, Robert did not fancy venturing among men whose voices had so lately been raised in mutiny. It was no more than natural they should be angry at having boys set over them, however great a crime had been committed, and it would

be difficult to say who did the deed, if, in the darkness—for the rays of the lantern did not extend many feet in either direction,—some one on the outer edge of the group should deal a deadly blow.

This fear did not prevent his obeying the sergeant's instructions without loss of time, and he it was who first arrived at the spot where Captain Lispenard was disarming the men and writing down their names for future reference.

Nicholas, who had incautiously let go his hold of a stanchion just as the ship rolled to leeward, and consequently been sent like a shot across the deck, did not succeed in getting to his post of duty until after the mutineers had been ordered to their bunks with instructions to remain there regardless of what might happen, until the command was given for them to do otherwise.

“I will not believe there are other mutinous men aboard, save those who have been disarmed,” Colonel Putnam said, raising his voice that all might hear; “but in case there be one who believes he can mend matters by raising a riot, I warn him that the first cry of insubordination is like to be his last. These men posted here at the door have strict orders to fire at the earliest show of mischief, and if they delay doing so even for the fraction of a minute, I

shall hold them personally responsible for all that may occur." Then in a lower tone he added to the old soldier, "Remember, Sergeant Prout, that immediate and decided action is necessary if the mutiny shows itself again. You may leave this door open in order to wedge yourselves within it so that the rolling of the vessel shall not fling you about. We will have the lantern slung just above your heads, and thus you can have some slight idea of what is going on."

The sergeant saluted when the colonel ceased speaking, and after a lantern had been hung in such fashion that there was no danger of its fetching away, the commander and those who had followed him left the deck.

The boys soon learned that by being posted at this portion of the ship they enjoyed better facilities for getting fresh air than when in their bunk; but this advantage was counterbalanced by the fact that it was necessary to exert all their strength at times in order to hold themselves in position.

Acting upon the colonel's hint, they lay at full length on the threshold, and were thus held in place as the ship rolled; but whenever she rose or fell on the towering waves, it was difficult to prevent being pitched forward or backward.

"I thought the bunk was as bad as it well could

be," Darius said in a low tone; "but it was comfortable as compared with this place."

"All of which goes to show that there is no plight so bad but that it may be worse," the sergeant rejoined philosophically. "How are you comin' on, Nicholas?"

"Sliding around with the rest of the squad," the would-be deserter replied almost cheerily, and his comrades were surprised that now, when the danger seemed as great as on a battlefield, he should preserve his courage. "There's one thing certain, though, I wouldn't fire on anybody here, no matter what might be done."

"If need should arise, an' you failed to carry out the command Colonel Putnam gave, I'd report you for punishment, even though the ship was a wreck an' we doin' our best to keep our noses above water."

Robert regretted that the old soldier should have spoken in such a severe tone just when Nicholas was beginning to act like his old self, and to prevent any more harsh words he asked:--

"Would you have fired, sergeant, if the colonel had not stopped you?"

"Of a surety I would!"

"And perhaps killed a man?"

"It would have been better that one, or even half a dozen were shot, than for the mutiny to gather

headway. Once anything of that kind is well started blood will flow unless the commander holds a firm hand. A soldier's duty is to obey orders instantly, and hesitation is as bad as flat disobedience. Them as know Israel Putnam as well as I do, understand that there will be no half-way measures with him when sharp action be necessary. If any man can bring them as follows him, out of a tight place, it is that same colonel, an' when the danger is greatest your wisest course is to hold yourself in readiness to do whatever he commands, in the shortest possible space of time."

"I reckon there won't be any more mutiny aboard the Golden Pippin," Darius said with a chuckle of satisfaction as he pulled himself into position after having been pitched several feet forward of his companions. "They are keeping precious quiet just now."

"Ay, but at the same time I never would trust him who started the row, knowin' as we do now what he's capable of doin'."

It was no longer possible to continue the conversation. Although the ship had been pitching about so violently that it seemed as if she could not increase the motion without going to the bottom, the rolling and tossing suddenly became much greater, and aft as the four sentinels were, they felt this all the more sensibly.

Above the roar of the gale and the myriad of noises they could hear the seamen running to and fro wildly, as if some new danger threatened, and now and again the sound of the captain's voice came to their ears as he roared a command through his trumpet.

More than one of the soldiers screamed aloud in fear, and some began to pray. From the cabin, which was but a few feet aft of where Sergeant Prout and the boys were stationed, a voice cried :—

“ We're on a lee shore, of that I'm certain. Shall I try to make my way on deck, colonel ? ”

“ Remain where you are, sir ! It is no worse for us than for the men who are imprisoned in the hold, and we must at least set a proper example.”

The term “ lee shore ” was not understood by the boys, therefore they failed to realize the imminence of the peril as did Sergeant Prout. He began pulling off his boots, a task which was rendered extremely difficult owing to his position, and Robert shouted in his ear, for the uproar was so great that by no other means could he have made himself heard :—

“ What are you counting on doing ? ”

The old soldier replied in the same fashion :—

“ The ship may be in a bad way, an' we had best

be prepared for the worst. Get rid of all the clothin' you can conveniently."

Remembering what had just been said about obedience to orders, Robert did as he was bidden, and as a matter of course Darius and Nicholas were curious to know the meaning of his movements.

He repeated what the sergeant had said, and it seemed to him as if the words had no more than been spoken before there came a mighty crash, followed by a blow so violent that it was as if some giant hand had struck the ship full in the bow.

Then came a rending and grinding of timbers; the hull was tossed aloft only to fall upon what appeared to be a solid substance, and from above was heard and felt the crashing of spars as they fell across the rail, crushing the timbers until great rents were made in the decks from fore to aft.

After that, for an instant, was a silence, seemingly profound because of the horrible confusion a moment previous, and the sentinels heard one of the soldiers cry in terror:—

"The ship is on the rocks! We are sinking! Shall we stay here to be drowned like dogs?"

"Make for the door, and cut down them as would try to stop you!" a voice cried, and then the horrible noises of rending timbers were heard once

more, while the waves beat upon the hull as if each succeeding one would crush it in.

“To your feet, lads!” Sergeant Prout cried, struggling to rise. “Remember the orders, an’ see to it that your muskets are primed!”

“Would you try to prevent the men from saving their lives?” Darius shouted, and before the old soldier could reply there came a voice from the passage leading to the cabin:—

“Shoot down the first who attempts to come this way!”

Then arose a howl of rage from the recruits, which could be heard distinctly even above the varied and terrifying noises on the outside, and by the faint gleam from the swaying lantern Robert saw that the men were gathering for a rush.

Now it was, before Sergeant Prout could discharge his weapon, although he held it in readiness, that Colonel Putnam, a pistol in each hand, forced his way past the sentinels until he was inside the doorway.

“It is death for you to advance by even so much as a yard!” he cried, and his words were distinctly heard by all, because at that instant there was another lull in the tempest.

“It is death to stay here!” some one shouted. “I had rather be shot than drowned!”

“There is no reason why either fate should overtake you! Act like brave men, and all may yet be well.”

“The ship is sinking; even now it may be too late for us to get out of this trap!”

“You fool!” the commander roared, stepping still nearer the throng of terrified men. “Can’t you understand that she has struck the rocks, and is held firm? Does she roll or pitch any more? Her very steadiness shows that she is in no immediate danger of going down——”

“How long do you count on holding us here?”

“Until the captain of the ship sends word that we are to come on deck! I am taking the chances with you, and is not my life as dear as yours? The seamen must not be hampered, as would be the case if you all rushed on deck! Remain here with me, and I promise to be the last who leaves this place.”

“But perhaps we’re not willin’ to trust to your foolishness.”

“It will be wisest to remember that I am in command, and as true as I’m standing here, I will put a bullet through the first who advances even a single pace!”

CHAPTER V.

INSUBORDINATION.

EVEN in his fear and amid the wild excitement of the moment, Robert was deeply impressed by the bravery of the colonel who thus faced the throng of men made mad by fear.

It needed but a single movement, the slightest advance of one man, to start at least four hundred recruits in a panic-stricken rush for the deck, and the officer could hardly have time to discharge his weapons before he would be trampled under foot. There was no possibility he might hold them back by force ; he must depend on threats and the power of his own personality until the more sensible should be made to understand that it would be little else than a useless sacrifice of life for them to carry out the wild impulse which seized every person when the knowledge came that the ship was a wreck.

As the throng involuntarily halted before this personification of bravery, the colonel took advantage of the opportunity to cry at the full strength

of his lungs, that he might readily be heard by all:—

“Try to realize the situation, my men! The ship is on the rocks, and so long as she thus remains stationary you know beyond the shadow of a doubt that she is in no danger of sinking. It is yet so dark that nothing can be seen, and from the beating of the waves you know the upper deck must be awash. To venture there now would be inviting death, for scores could not fail of being swept overboard, while your presence would only impede the work of the seamen. Remain here quietly with me, and Captain Lispenard shall be sent to learn, so far as may be, the condition of affairs.”

No reply came from the terrified men. Already were many of them beginning to understand that their commander was in the right—that it would be much like suicide to rush on deck in a body, and a few of the calmer ones quietly, yet in such a manner that they could not fail of being observed by the others, returned to their bunks.

“That is as it should be,” Colonel Putnam cried approvingly, as he put the weapons in his belt. “Captain Lispenard, you will go on deck, speak with the master of the ship, and, returning here, make your report so that all may hear.”

The captain saluted and withdrew. A few more

of the men returned to their bunks ; but the majority of the force remained in a body within a dozen yards of the passage.

“Stand by your muskets,” Sergeant Prout whispered cautiously to the boys. “There’s no need of makin’ any threatenin’ movement ; but it is well to be prepared for the worst. Here are fifty or so ready for any kind of mischief ; all that’s lackin’ is a bit more courage.”

Now it was that the first show of insubordination came from a quarter whence it was least expected. Nicholas had borne himself so well since the mutinous spirit of the men was displayed, that his comrades, believing he had conquered his timorousness, ceased to keep close watch upon him.

Therefore it was that they were taken wholly by surprise when, with a loud cry of fear, he suddenly dropped his musket and ran through the passage into the cabin.

Hearing the cry Colonel Putnam turned suddenly, drawing his pistols, and had Nicholas been one whit less fleet of foot he would have served as a target for the commander. As it was, however, darkness shrouded him before the officer could wheel about, and the disobedient lad was temporarily safe.

The temper of the throng Colonel Putnam had been holding at bay was such that any movement,

however slight, served to excite them, and they pressed forward menacingly until it seemed certain a mad rush would be made.

“Make ready, sergeant!” the commander shouted, and facing the excited men he added, “Remember the warning; it will not be given again. Hold steady where you are, or the foremost must of a surety be killed!”

“Take aim at the leaders; keep your finger on the trigger, and press it at the first word of command,” Sergeant Prout said to Robert and Darius as he leveled his musket.

Those in the lead of the recruits understood, however great their terror, that they could hardly escape a bullet if the three weapons were discharged at such short range, and wisely hung back, but the men in the rear pressed forward until the foremost were forced within not more than six feet from where Colonel Putnam stood.

The commander spoke to them once more, urging all to exercise common-sense at this time when their lives would pay the penalty of an ill-advised move, and after five minutes had been spent in such manner the mischief wrought by Nicholas was remedied.

Again the frightened men were at a stand-still, held in place by their commander, backed as he was by the leveled weapons of those immediately behind.

him, and affairs between-decks were in this condition when Captain Lispenard returned.

“Well, sir?” Colonel Putnam demanded sharply as the officer hesitated, “let us know the worst and the best. I have given my word that the men shall be informed of our true condition, and you need not be afraid to speak out so that all may hear.”

The recruits leaned forward eagerly, each burning with impatience for the report which it would seem by the captain’s hesitation must be disheartening.

“That the ship is on the rocks is about all to be determined until day breaks, for the night is so dark, with a driving rain which is much like a veil of fog, that even the loom of the land, if any there be near-about, cannot be discerned. The vessel has been driven high up on the reef, as can be told by the fact that the waves no longer beat upon her with so much fury, and the tide is falling. The master reports that if the soldiers can be kept below there is every reason to believe all will be saved when morning comes.”

“Is it certain we are near land?” Colonel Putnam asked.

“The master declares that such must be the case, for he knows of no reef in this vicinity, save near the shore.”

The recruits relaxed somewhat from their strained

attitudes of listeners, and long-drawn sighs of relief could be heard on every hand. The report was far from being as disheartening as all had feared. A moment previous perhaps not one among them believed there was even a fighting chance for life, and now it could readily be understood, if Captain Lispenard's report was correct, that the situation was far from being desperate.

“What about the weather, sir?” the colonel asked.

“There is every indication that the fury of the storm is spent, and the sailors believe the morrow will be fair.”

“What is the time?”

“An hour past midnight, sir.”

“What are the seamen doing?”

“Clearing away the wreck of the spars which have fallen, and, that done, the master declares they shall remain idle until sunrise, for the ship is held so fast by the reef that it is needless to imperil life by attempting to do more in the darkness.”

“And your brother officers?”

“They remain in the cabin according to your orders, sir.”

“Let them stir themselves to procure lanterns, and bring them here. We will dispel this darkness so far as possible, and then serve out rations. See to it, captain, that the cooks are set to work; since

the ship is steady there can be nothing to prevent them from attending to their duty."

The captain saluted and withdrew, after which not less than two hundred of the men returned to their bunks, leaving the more cowardly and mutinous standing by themselves.

This decided show of confidence was taken advantage of by the commander without loss of time.

"You have heard the report, and know there is no danger for the present, therefore you will go to your respective bunks in order that we may have no unnecessary difficulty in serving rations."

The men hesitated only for an instant, and then, singly or in groups of six or a dozen, they broke away until the last had obeyed the command.

"You may stand at ease," the colonel said in a low tone as he turned toward the three behind him, who had kept their muskets leveled during all this time. "There is little fear we shall have any more trouble, yet it will be well to remain where you are."

"If only Nicholas had behaved himself, matters would be in good shape now," Robert said with a sigh to Darius as he lowered his weapon, and the latter replied:—

"I begin to think he can't act like other lads, it is much as if he suddenly turned crazy when danger is near, and yet he held himself properly during the

mutiny and when the ship first went on the rocks.”

“I would he had never enlisted, for it is to me as if I was responsible for his welfare.”

The coming of the ship's master and two seamen interrupted the conversation.

“It is a relief sir, to see matters here in such good shape,” the former said to Colonel Putnam. “Had these men come on deck when the ship first struck, many lives must have been lost.”

“Soldiers are accustomed to obeying orders however great the danger, therefore these men are here,” Colonel Putnam replied, and Robert detected a tinge of sarcasm in his tones. “Has there been any change in affairs since Captain Lispenard applied to you for information?”

“None whatever, sir. The Golden Pippin lays as if on the stocks, and there's little danger she will leave this snug resting-place till the tide rises, which will be in about ten hours. Meanwhile there are indications that the storm is well-nigh spent, and in two hours of daylight your men can be put ashore. I have come below with the carpenter to learn how much water there may be in the hold.”

Colonel Putnam bowed as if to intimate that he had no further questions to ask, and the master went below.

Before he returned the officers appeared with as many lanterns as could be found, and soon the gloom was so far dispelled that the men could distinguish the forms of their comrades.

Captain Lispenard reported that the cooks had been set to work, and asked if the distribution of rations should be begun at once.

“Call a detail for the purpose, choosing those men best known to you, and set about the task without loss of time. You will take care there be an ample supply of hot drink, whether it be tea or coffee, and deal out to each man all he desires.”

Then the master of the ship returned from the lower hold with the report that there was no fear the water would rise sufficiently high before daylight to cause any inconvenience.

“Her bottom has been crushed as flat as any pancake, and the sea had free entrance, therefore it is as high now as it will be till after flood-tide.”

Surely such a statement as this was sufficient to remove all fears as to immediate danger, and Sergeant Prout whispered to the lads:—

“I reckon matters will go along smooth for a spell; but it was a tight squeeze at one time, an' none but Colonel Putnam could have pulled us through. I'd like to be alone with Nicholas Vallet an' a stout birchen switch for ten minutes or more.”

“May I go after him?” Robert asked. “He must have come out of his fright somewhat by this time, and it is shameful he should be disobeying orders when every other member of the force is behaving himself.”

“You’ll be obliged to leave him to his folly, since the colonel is not likely to give permission for either of us to go on deck. Unless I’m mightily mistaken Nicholas will rue this night’s work, for our commander ain’t the man to forget an act of insubordination.”

“I suppose he did wrong in running out; but I can’t blame him so very much, because it was all I could do to hold myself here, believing the ship was on the point of sinking.”

“Ay, lad, but you *did* hold yourself here, an’ although a soldier has no claim to praise for havin’ done his duty, I’ll give you full credit. Nicholas could hardly have done a worse thing; the men had quieted down a bit, an’ he simply gave the signal for another outbreak. His deed might have cost the lives of us four who stood here, an’ for the good of the service generally, if for no other reason, he should be given a lesson that won’t soon be forgot.”

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the cooks’ squad with rations, and soon every

man of the command was eating ravenously, for they were really in a half famished condition.

Then was brought great coppers full of hot coffee and tea, and this was served until the last man could neither eat nor drink any more.

A full hour was spent in this pleasing task, and during all that time Colonel Putnam stood just in front of the three sentinels, silent and motionless.

Not until Captain Lispenard reported that the men had been fed did the commander speak, and then it was to say :—

“I reckon we shan’t have much more trouble with them, Lispenard. A man seldom turns mutineer on a full stomach, and, besides, the danger doesn’t appear to be as great to them as when they were hungry. You may relieve Sergeant Prout and the lads. Allow them to go on deck, and set in their places three men on whom you can rely.”

“Slip through the passage quietly, for there is no good reason why the others should know you have gone,” the captain said in a whisper, after he had summoned New Rochelle men to go on guard in their stead.

The old soldier and the boys had been served with food while the remainder of the recruits were eating, and they hastened away silently, eager to be in the fresh air once more.

Robert was literally trembling with apprehension as he emerged from the after companion-way, for, regardless of all that had been said, he believed the condition of the ship to be far more serious than was represented.

He might well have spared himself such useless anticipation, however, for once on deck it was impossible to see very much more than when he was below.

The darkness was dense, and the rain yet falling, although not in such torrents, as when the Golden Pippin first struck the reef. On either side, sounding as if it was far away, could be heard the roaring of the surf, but there was no longer any weight in those waves which struck the stranded craft.

There were ample signs of wreck on the decks, which were strewn with fragments of spars, and snake-like lengths of rope; the bulwarks were stove on the starboard side, and the forecastle deck appeared to have been entirely carried away.

“I allow it looks dubious to a landlubber like you, sergeant,” the second mate said as he joined the little party on their tour of observation.

“I don’t know very much about such things, but it strikes me I can tell when a vessel is sound, or as near a wreck as this one.”

“A blind man couldn’t be deceived as to our con-

dition, an' that's a fact ; but we're hopin' the land ain't far away, though how we may contrive to come at it is more than I can say just now. It might be managed easily enough if there were no more than the regular crew on board ; but five hundred lubberly soldiers ain't so handily managed."

"Where are the boats?" Sergeant Prout asked quickly, and the mate hesitated and stammered as if seeking words to make suitable reply, until the old soldier said quietly:—

"So they've been carried away, eh?"

"I didn't mean to let out that secret till it had grown so light that whoever came on deck could see for himself," the mate replied in a sheepish tone, "and I ask that you keep quiet about it. Such of the boats as wasn't carried away were stove when the masts went by the board."

"And how far do you guess we are from the land?" the sergeant asked as if he had little interest in the reply.

"A goodish bit, I'm thinking, else we'd hear the breakers."

"I thought the captain allowed we must be close ashore?"

"Well, a couple of miles would be what you might call close, an' yet I reckon there are a good many of you soldiers who couldn't swim that far."

“Have you guessed how long the wreck is likely to hold where she is?”

“Till the next high tide—perhaps longer, if it falls a dead calm; but it ain’t safe to count on anything of that kind.”

“Then, accordin’ to your reckonin’, we’re on a reef two miles or more from the shore, without anything in the way of a boat, an’ are bound to go ashore or drown ’twixt now an’ say nine o’clock this comin’ mornin’?”

“I’ll admit it’s much that way, sergeant, though we wasn’t counting on letting any of you soldiers know just the truth so long as it could be kept a secret.”

“The day will break in an hour or more, an’ then there’ll be no holdin’ the men below, so little harm has been done in givin’ us an inklin’ of the truth a bit ahead of time. I’m free to confess that I don’t like the look of things.”

“Neither do I; but how is it to be helped?”

“If Colonel Putnam can’t answer that question I’m certain it sticks me,” and the sergeant walked away as if the conversation no longer interested him; but the boys who followed close at his heels observed that he did not speak in the same cheerful tone as before the truth was known.

Robert understood that their situation was really

desperate ; that the officers of the ship were deeply concerned as to how the soldiers might be set ashore before the wreck should be dashed to pieces after the rising sea was high enough to strike her with full force, yet his mind was on his missing friend rather than the dangers of the moment.

Although they had walked fore and aft, nothing had been seen of Nicholas, and there was a fear in young Clement's heart that the rash boy might have been swept overboard, for when he left between-decks in defiance of Colonel Putnam's orders the decks must have been awash.

"Let us go up on the other side once more," he suggested to the sergeant. "I would like to know what may be in that snarl of rope near the galley."

"You're searchin' for the little villain who came near to undoin' the brave work of our commander," the old soldier said sharply. "It will be better for all concerned if he's left severely alone. I'm hopin' his insubordination has brought about the proper punishment."

"Don't say that, sergeant," Robert cried imploringly. "While we are all in such danger it seems wicked to wish that Nicholas, who surely isn't evil at heart, has come to his death."

"It *is* because we're in such sore straits that I'm wishin' we may be well rid of him. A lad of his

kind is like a match when a powder-keg stands open near by—there's no knowin' when a spark may fly off that'll send us into the next world."

"There ain't anything I can do to make things worse than they are now," a voice from behind exclaimed, and, turning quickly, the boys saw Nicholas, who had crept out from his hiding-place amid the raffle of cordage Robert had proposed they should examine. "I heard the captain say to the mate that it wasn't possible a third of the soldiers could get ashore, 'cause there'd be so little time after the day broke, and the sea was running so high."

"An' that's all the comfort you got out of what you did, eh?" Sergeant Prout asked angrily. "You'd better have stayed where you was, for then the facts wouldn't have been known quite so soon."

"I couldn't help doing what I did," Nicholas replied in a tearful voice. "I was getting on right well, with you alongside of me, when suddenly it seemed as if the ship was sinking, and if I'd known a bullet was going straight through my head the next minute I couldn't have stopped there any longer."

"It stands you in hand to see that sich spasms don't often get the best of your common-sense, now you've turned soldier," the sergeant replied, "else you'll find yourself in front of a firin' squad some

fine mornin', an' these lads here will take the news to New Rochelle that you were shot for desertin' or skulkin'. I don't know how this scrape may turn, but I wouldn't be in your shoes for a month's pay."

"Was the colonel mad?" Nicholas asked of Robert, and the latter replied truthfully:—

"I don't know, but it is certain that what you did made him a lot of extra trouble, and it was downright disobedience of orders."

"If all that the captain of this ship has said be true, there's little likelihood I'll suffer very much from what the colonel can do, for I can't swim a stroke, and will be one of the first to drown."

Nicholas appeared on the point of yielding to one of his mad impulses again, and Darius proceeded to give him a severe shaking, as if hoping by such means to infuse into him a little common-sense, while Sergeant Prout led Robert aside a few paces, saying to him in a whisper:—

"Lad, I want you to go below an' tell the colonel jest how the case stands. I'd do it myself but that the men would suspect somethin' was wrong if they saw me talkin' privately with him."

"It won't be long before he can see for himself," Robert ventured to suggest.

"Ay, but till that time comes he'll be thinkin' the master of the ship has told the whole truth, an' I

want he should have a chance to turn the matter over in his mind before the recruits come on deck. Say to him, quiet like, as if you wasn't speakin' of anything in particular, that we're above two miles from the land, every boat stove, an' the sea runnin' so high there's no chance of its calmin' down before this old hooker goes to the bottom, which will be in the neighborhood of nine o'clock this comin' mornin'."

"Do you think he'll give as much heed to me as he would to you?"

"Ay, lad, when you say it was me who sent you. Get below now, an' take good care that nobody overhears the message."

CHAPTER VI.

FOR LIFE.

NEVER for a moment did Robert so much as dream of refusing to do what the sergeant had commanded, although the Golden Pippin appeared to be such a frail wreck that almost anything was preferable to venturing below again. The danger that the ship would slip from the reef into deep water at any moment, seemed to him very great, and once such a catastrophe occurred death would come very quickly to all who could not swim.

He turned promptly to obey the order, however, and was about to descend the cabin stairs when the master of the ship confronted him.

“What are you doing on deck?” was the question asked with a certain huskiness of tone which told that this man, who needed all his wits at such a time, had been stupefying his senses with strong drink.

“Colonel Putnam gave my comrades and me permission to come up, sir,” Robert replied with civility.

“Oh, he did, eh? Well, how many may there be of your crew?”

“Four of us are here, sir.”

“Very well,” the master of the ship said as he lurched against the companion-way in the effort to assume an attitude of authority, “having come, you’ll stay here till daybreak, for I’m not in the mood to let them crazy recruits know all that’s been done aboard this ship.”

“My orders are to go below again, sir,” the lad replied, as he attempted to force a passage past the intoxicated man.

“My orders are that you stay on deck, and we’ll see who is in authority—the captain of this ship, or them who are no more than passengers, even though they do chance to wear swords.”

Fortunately for Robert, so far as the possibility of obeying orders was concerned, the seaman had spoken so loudly that Sergeant Prout heard every word, and came quickly toward the companion-way.

“That lad has been sent below, and it will not be safe for you to prevent him,” the old soldier said sharply, but in a low tone lest the altercation might alarm those between-decks.

“Don’t you dare talk to me about what is safe,” the master roared. “My orders are to be obeyed so long as I’m in command of this ship.”

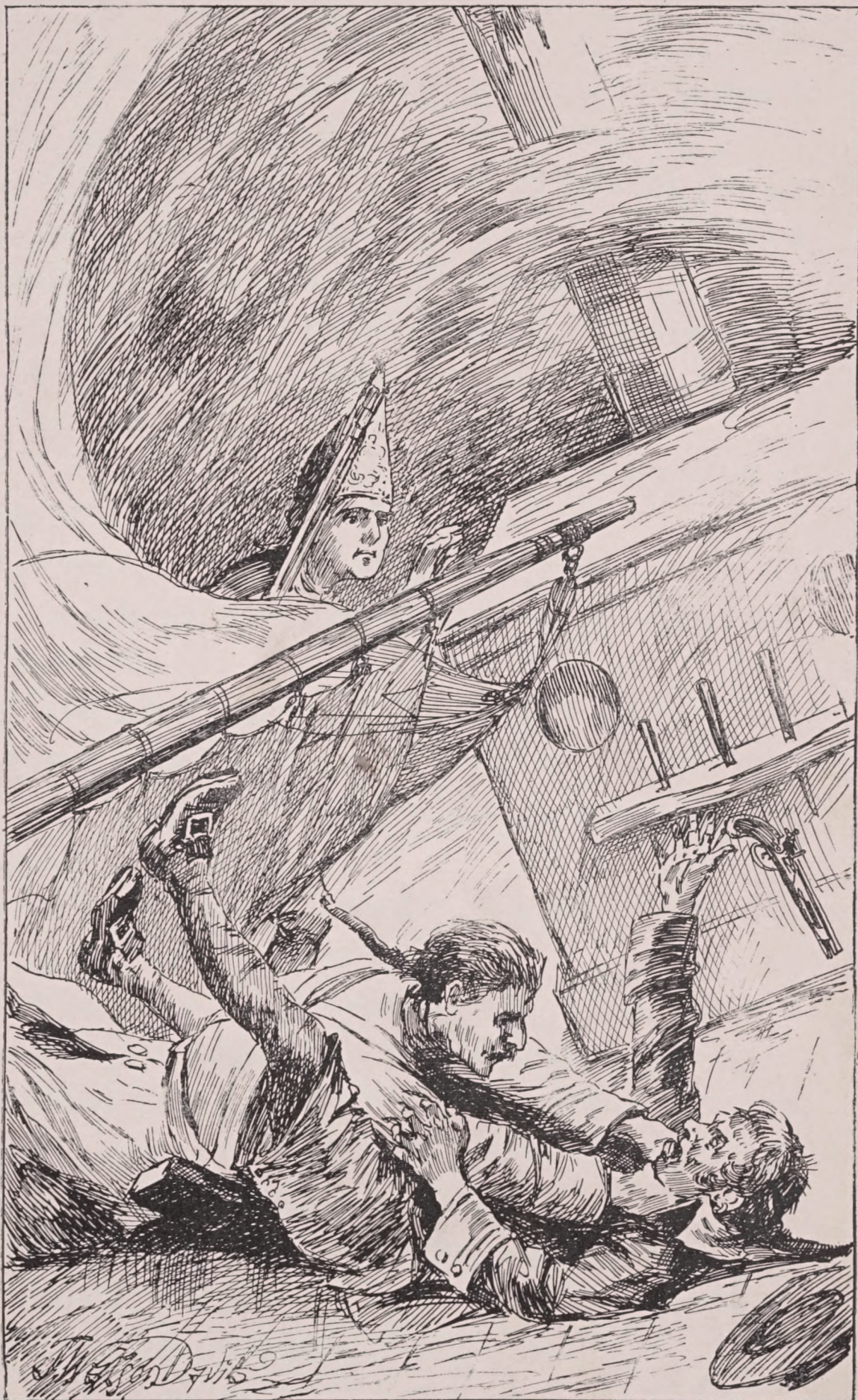
“ You’re not even in command of yourself just now, and if you delay the lad half a minute longer I’ll see to it you are put in irons! Get on, Robert, and to the information with which you are charged, add that the captain of the ship is drunk.”

“ Mutiny, eh?” the partially stupefied master cried with what can only be described as a snarl. “ You red-coated gentry have had a hand at that below, but it can’t be played on deck! I’ll show you how I put an end to such tricks!”

Saying this the man whipped out a pistol, and advanced with it leveled full at the soldier’s breast as if on the point of discharging the weapon.

Sergeant Prout literally leaped upon him, and as both fell to the deck clasped in each other’s embrace, Robert ran hurriedly down the companion-way, understanding full well that there should be no delay in acquainting Colonel Putnam with the condition of affairs.

As he descended he could hear the sounds of the scuffling, and before gaining the passage which led to the hold it was possible to distinguish the sergeant’s voice as he called upon Darius to aid him; but the lad continued on, checking his speed only when he had come to the doorway, near which stood the three sentinels.



“Sergeant Prout literally leaped upon the Captain, and both fell to the deck clasped in each other’s embrace.”—Page 92.

At the Siege of Havana.

“What’s going on above?” one of the men asked, but Robert gave no heed to the question.

Hastily assuming an air of composure, he approached the colonel, grasping his coat-tails energetically to attract the officer’s attention.

Colonel Putnam turned suddenly, like one on the alert for danger, and an expression of impatience passed over his face on seeing the lad.

“I thought you were given permission to go on deck.”

“So I was, sir; but Sergeant Prout ordered me to speak with you privately,” Robert replied in a whisper.

The colonel moved aside a few paces, and while seemingly engaged with something on the deck which caused him to bend over, said in a friendly tone:—

“Speak quickly, but softly, lad, and do not make too many words of the story.”

“Sergeant Prout bade me say that the ship is above two miles from the land, every boat stove, and the sea running very high. He also added what was not known until I attempted to come below, that the master of the ship is drunk.”

The colonel assumed an erect position, and speaking indifferently, as if seized by a sudden and not important idea, said:

“ You may say to such officers as yet remain in the cabin that it is well they join me here. We must decide upon the order in which we will go ashore, for there is to be no delay as soon as day breaks.”

Robert obeyed without undue haste, and, this done, he remained between-decks, because nothing had been said as to his returning to his comrades.

During several moments Colonel Putnam spoke with the officers who had obeyed his summons, concerning the order in which the troops would land, and directed that each captain and lieutenant should at once station himself near his men.

These orders had been give sufficiently loud for nearly all to hear the words, and the colonel added in conclusion :

“ You will see to it, gentlemen, that everything is in readiness for immediate disembarkation. The men will come on deck in squads of twenty, each in charge of an officer, and the second squad is not to ascend until the first has gotten clear of the ship. I do not think it will be well to open the hatches immediately ; we will make our way out through the cabin passage.”

While his subordinates were taking their stations according to his directions, the colonel said in a whisper to the sentinels :—

“ You are to hold this entrance at all hazards.

Allow no man, be he officer or private, to pass you save by direct orders delivered through this lad," and the colonel motioned toward Robert.

Then, beckoning for the boy to follow, he went quickly into the cabin, halting there only long enough to make certain his pistols were in proper order, after which he ascended the companion-way.

Directly at the head of the stairs stood Sergeant Prout, Darius, and Nicholas, and at their feet lay the master of the ship, bound hand and foot, with the bight of a rope in his mouth as gag.

"I took the liberty of makin' him fast, sir, an' shut off his wind because he was bent on arousin' all hands by his cries," the old soldier said as he gravely saluted.

"Are you certain he is under the influence of liquor, sergeant?"

"As sure as a man well can be, sir. Shall I slip this gag for a minute?"

"Ay, but stand ready to put it in place again if he makes any undue noise."

It was well this last order had been spoken, for no sooner was the rope loosened than the angry man burst forth in a torrent of threats, uttering the words in such manner as left no doubt as to his condition, and screaming at the full strength of his lungs.

Sergeant Prout did not wait for a second order to put a quietus on the brute, but deftly slipped the gag in place before the master had well begun his tirade.

“Roll him down against the rail where there will be little danger of his being trampled upon, and leave him there. It would be no more than right to throw the wretch overboard, for he is very nearly guilty of deliberate murder when he stupefies himself with strong drink while the lives of half a thousand men depend upon his clear-headedness.”

The sergeant did not spend many seconds in obeying this order; with the toe of his boot he rolled the helpless man over to the rail, and there left him, saying to the first mate, who came up hurriedly as if just understanding that his superior officer was in trouble:—

“It was the colonel’s orders an’ I reckon he outranks any man aboard this wreck.”

“Look you, sir,” and Israel Putnam turned sharply upon the mate, “I count on your taking the place of master, while he who lies yonder is unfit to care for himself. With so many to perform the labor, it should be possible to build rafts such as would carry us to the shore?”

“While the surf runs as it does now, that craft would need be a stout one that could make the

trip safely, more particularly if it was laden with men."

"But we are not to stand here with folded hands, saying it is useless to make any effort at saving ourselves! Set your seamen at work gathering such spars and timbers as will suffice for at least one raft. It is better to do battle for life, than stand idly awaiting death, else I would not be here this day. Get about your work at once, and it will go hard with him who shirks his duty!"

The mate hastened away, calling upon each of the crew by name, and the colonel turned toward Robert.

"Tell Major Bridges to send forty men, in charge of two lieutenants, at once, and without arms."

When Robert returned from this mission the squad was close at his heels, and Colonel Putnam stood on the quarter-deck as if to meet them.

The recruits were ranged in line, as if on parade, and the commander thus addressed them, speaking in such a tone as convinced all that he said no more than he believed to be strictly true:—

"The ship's boats have been stove, and it may be we are a couple of miles from land; but the land is there, and it should be no very difficult task to extricate ourselves from this uncomfortable position, providing every man keeps his head. But once let

a panic arise, as we have already had a taste of, and death awaits all. I ask that you set about building rafts. The seamen will join you, and when the day breaks we will send ashore as many as can find lodgment upon the crafts you may make."

By this time the mate came aft to say that in the lazaretto was a store of harpoon lines, for the Golden Pippin had been in the whale fishery before serving as transport, and he asked the colonel's permission to send some of the crew down in search of them.

"You may take the sergeant and two of the lads. They should be a sufficient force, I cannot run the chances that the seamen will hold their tongues."

"Very well, sir," the mate replied meekly, understanding full well that this man who gave his orders so decidedly was of a different mould than he who lay in a drunken stupor on the deck.

The sergeant, Darius, and Nicholas accompanied the first officer of the ship, and Robert followed the colonel forward to where the recruits and a portion of the crew had begun work by bringing a lot of spars to that portion of the deck near where the rail was stove.

When Colonel Putnam saw that this force was well at their task, he directed the lad to tell

Major Bridges to send up forty more men without weapons, and after this order had been obeyed the commander addressed them in much the same words as when the first squad came on deck.

Before these last recruits were fairly set to work those who had gone after the harpoon lines returned heavily laden, and to the second mate was given the task of directing the labor of lashing the spars together.

Then another squad was ordered up from below, and there was not less than an hundred and forty men employed in the task of fashioning such craft as was possible with the materials at their command.

The work was not pushed forward with very remarkable celerity because of the darkness ; but every moment thus employed was just so much of an advantage gained when the day should break.

The rain had ceased falling ; the wind was decreasing sensibly ; the waves were still boisterous, however, and there was no hope the ocean would be calm until after many hours had passed.

The first gray light of dawn could be seen in the eastern sky when the second mate announced that two rafts were ready.

“The timbers will remain together, sir, that I’ll vouch for ; but whether it’ll be possible for them as

are not sailors to hold themselves on such a crazy craft is another matter."

"That will be according to each man's determination and stout-heartedness. Have you material enough to build rafts for all hands?"

"There is plenty of stuff between decks, sir. The bunks can be taken down—they were put up in sections,—and with that much lumber I could give passage to a thousand men, providing the sea permitted."

"Continue with such material as you have at hand, and you shall soon have the lumber from below," the colonel replied, and, turning toward Robert, he added, "Tell Major Bridges that the muskets are to be shipped on shore as one cargo, therefore the men will file aft and deposit the weapons where they can best be got at after we are ready to bring such equipment on deck."

The major looked sharply at Robert when this command was repeated, and said in a low tone :

"So the men are to be disarmed? I had a suspicion all was not as it should be."

The order was promptly executed, however, and before he returned on deck Robert saw the muskets stacked neatly near the bulkhead, the recruits apparently having no idea as to why this move had been made.

“It has been done, sir,” the lad reported as he stood once more in front of the commander. “The muskets are stacked.”

Instead of replying to this Colonel Putnam went below, and Robert, believing he was expected to remain constantly within call, followed him.

When they were between decks and Colonel Putnam began to speak, the lad understood why the recruits had been disarmed.

The commander plainly explained the condition of affairs, not attempting to make light of the danger which threatened, but stating exactly the chances for life, and the number of hours which probably remained before the ship would be hurled into deep water by the rising waves.

“Every man can be landed in safety if each keeps his wits about him,” he said in conclusion. “But once let a panic arise, and I will not be answerable for a corporal’s guard of you. Because of the fact that the danger is so great, and any interference with my plans for setting you ashore would doom many to death, I have resolved to shoot down the first who gives way to his fears, or shows signs of insubordination, and this will be done without further warning. Remain calm, obey orders, and I promise that not a life shall be lost. Attempt to disobey, or give way to fear, and for the safety of

those who work manfully for life, you shall be shot without delay. Major Bridges, detail twenty men and instruct them to act exactly as I have promised in case any hot-head makes trouble. Let as many more stand guard over the muskets."

The colonel paused as if to get some idea of the effect of his words, but not a murmur was heard. The knowledge that they were in imminent danger from drowning, and the certainty that Israel Putnam would not recede one whit from the stand he had taken, had the effect of closing every mouth.

Then the commander explained that the timbers forming the bunks were to be sent on deck as soon as the hatches had been removed, and enjoined the officers to superintend the work, so that not a moment should be wasted.

When the colonel, followed by Robert, was on the upper deck again, the day had broken, and it was possible to have some idea of what awaited those who took passage on the frail rafts.

Between the wreck and the shore was a stretch of angry water not less than a mile and a half wide, where the waves were towering up like green mountains, and dashing into torrents of foam as they rolled in on the shore.

It was a fearsome spectacle when viewed by those who must trust their lives to the rude fabrics which

would serve in the stead of boats, and Robert did not dare gaze at it many moments lest he should grow cowardly.

He observed, however, that Nicholas was crouching behind the rail near where the drunken captain lay, and knew the would-be deserter was again panic-stricken with terror.

“If he don't fight for his own life now he'll never see home again,” Robert muttered, and then his attention was attracted to a group near the starboard rail forward.

One of the rafts was in readiness to be launched, and the men near by were engaged in what seemed to be some childish game, but Robert soon learned they were drawing lots to determine who should make the first venture.

Fifteen were to embark, although the fabric could have sustained nearly twice as many; but these first voyagers were to carry with them the end of a rope, which it was hoped might be made fast on shore, and it would not be wise to overload the raft, hampered as it must be by the trailing line.

Of these fifteen, ten were soldiers, and the remainder sailors. Each man had some bit of timber to serve him as a paddle, and Israel Putnam made no motion to interfere when the first mate took it upon himself to give the commands.

“Take your time, lads,” the officer said, “for much depends on our stretching a line. Lash yourselves together before casting off, and then there’ll be less likelihood any will lose the number of his mess. The tide sets inshore, and it should carry the raft that way even though the wind be against you. There’s no danger of drifting out to sea, for we’ll haul in on the line if that is likely to happen. Let her go over now, and all jump when she’s waterborne. Then pass the line around your bodies, and God grant you float in safety.”

The men were eager to end the suspense, and the mate had hardly ceased speaking before the frail craft was forced over the side.

It seemed to Robert as if the crew leaped at the same instant, and for a time he thought all hands had gone overboard; but soon the raft rose on the crest of a wave, showing the little company on their knees passing a harpoon line from one to the other.

One man stood forward on the ship, paying out a half-inch rope as the fabric was carried inshore by the current, and those on deck would have ceased work to watch the struggle between life and death, but that the colonel cried sharply :—

“Keep to your tasks! This is no time to stand gaping after your comrades. Let another crew be formed and put off without delay. Send raft after

raft until one of them gains the shore. A single glance at the waves is enough to show that they are rising every moment—soon it will be too late.”

Robert now observed for the first time that the main hatch had been removed, and from below were being hoisted on deck the timbers which had so lately served as sleeping quarters.

Now all was bustle and systematic work ; the knowledge of the great danger had rendered every man passive to the wishes of the commander, and no word or act of insubordination could be heard or seen.

The guards were doing duty below, however, and Colonel Putnam kept careful watch for the first sign of mutiny or panic.

Sergeant Prout and Darius were laboring with the raft builders ; Nicholas yet remained crouching behind the rail, and Robert, believing it was his duty to keep close at the heels of the commander, had good opportunity for watching those who were struggling to gain the shore.

It seemed to him impossible the frail fabric would live from one moment to another. At times it was completely submerged by the angry waters, only the heads of the men showing above the surface, and then it was as if she rode high on the crest of the swell.

During such moments as these last the wind had

full sweep upon the raft, and it was forced back toward the ship; but when the collection of spars had sunk deep again, the current carried them inshore.

Robert counted again and again, and each time he made out fifteen. All were yet alive; but would they be able to gain the shore before the Golden Pippin was dashed to pieces?

At the end of half an hour this first craft was about midway between the reef and the boiling surf, while four other rafts had been launched, and their crews also were battling with the elements.

Not less than eighty men were struggling for life in that mad whirl of waters, and to the lad it did not seem probable a single one would reach the land, save as a corpse.

Around the stranded ship the water steadily arose until, when the third raft had been launched, it was so high that the waves beat against the hull with such force as to cause it to quiver.

There was no man on board who did not understand that within a very short time after the tide was at its height the wreck would be rent and riven until nothing remained save a shapeless mass of planks and cordage. It was also apparent that there would not much longer be an opportunity to continue the work of trying to save life, and there

were yet nearly five hundred soldiers and sailors on board.

Robert believed Colonel Putnam to be the one above all others who might be relied upon in such an emergency, and was confident all would be saved until he accidentally heard the first mate say to the second :—

“I’ve been cast away twice, Jim, dismasted once, an’ served my trick on a burnin’ vessel ; but things never looked so squally to me as they do now. I’m thinkin’ its nigh time for us to care for ourselves.”

“Accordin’ to my way of thinkin’ we can’t do that any too soon. What does this bloomin’ militia officer know about such work as is laid out here? You may take my head for a plum-puddin’ if so many as fifty red-coated recruits see the sun set to-night.”

CHAPTER VII.

ASHORE.

ROBERT'S first impulse was to report immediately to Colonel Putnam that which he had heard; but after a moment's hesitation he decided against doing anything of the kind, because of the fact that such a course would make him appear much like a tell-tale.

"He would think I was trying to curry favor by running with every bit of tattle I heard, and I'd soon get myself disliked," was what he mentally said, but at the same time he was firm in the determination to ask the sergeant's advice as soon as it should be possible to speak with him privately.

A full hour had elapsed since the first raft put off from the ship. Driven back every few moments by the wind, despite the current and their efforts at the paddles, the men had sailed a zigzag course, now on the verge of being carried out to sea, and again in danger of dashing against that portion of the reef which rose above the surface between the land and the location of the wreck.

Any but the bravest in all that ship's load would have given up in despair; but these gallant fellows toiled and tugged, seemingly in nowise disheartened by the buffeting of the waves, until finally, when those on the ship had lost all hope, a lull of the wind admitted of their arriving within twenty yards or less of the beach.

Then it was that their comrades on the deck of the ship saw them cast off the line which held all together; saw two tie one end of the rope round their bodies, and leap into the boiling surf.

A cheer from those on the other rafts was added to by shouts of encouragement from the anxious men on board the Golden Pippin, and not a hand was raised to continue the labor, or a pair of eyes removed from the tiny dots which could be seen amid the yeasty waters, until the brave men, moving as if well-nigh exhausted, crept slowly up on the shore beyond reach of the waves.

Then a shout of triumph went up from every throat, and every heart beat more freely, for now it would be possible, as soon as the hawser was made fast ashore, to propel the clumsy rafts to and from the beach rapidly until all were landed in safety.

The most difficult portion of the task had been accomplished; the remainder was only a matter of so much time.

“There’s no need of my saying anything even to the sergeant,” Robert thought as he drew in a long, full breath of relief. “Our people will be saved now, whether the rascally mates desert us or not.”

From this moment the work of disembarking the men went on rapidly. The only danger to be apprehended was when the recruits attempted to leap from the deck of the ship to the raft in waiting, and this was guarded against by fastening a rope to the waists of those who could not swim, so they might be hauled inboard again if, perchance, they missed a footing.

The hawser was made fast ashore to a tree, and as other rafts—those lately constructed—were laden with men and forced toward the shore by pulling on the rope, the three crafts which had been sent out with the first, but yet drifted helplessly about, were hauled back by their tow-lines in order that they might gain the land more quickly, as well as to avoid the possibility of their being blown out to sea.

The most imminent of the danger was passed. The recruits were rapidly leaving the ship, and Robert understood that the commander had no further need of his services. In fact, from the moment the first raft was hauled up on the beach Colonel Putnam had given over the more laborious portion of the task to his subordinate officers, and went below

to break his fast, for until this moment he had neither eaten nor drank since the storm arose.

Now it was that Robert looked around for Nicholas, and finally found him kneeling by the side of the fettered shipmaster, watching with eager eyes the landing of the men.

“Have you been here all the time, and while there was so much work to be done?” he asked reproachfully, and Nicholas replied in a tremulous voice:—

“I couldn’t do otherwise, Robert Clement. It is as if death has been at my elbow every minute since I escaped from between-decks, and one is not able to do much when he feels himself dying.”

“But you have been in no greater danger than the others, and yet all have worked. I would rather die fighting for life, than to stand idly watching its approach. Besides, now that the hawser has been made fast ashore, the danger is passed——”

“Passed?” Nicholas screamed. “Look at those men leaping on to that raft! Even though one has a rope attached to his body, there is danger of being crushed to death between the ship and that poor substitute for a boat!”

“If these spasms of fear which come over you cannot be avoided, and I question much whether such be the case, no one can feel pity after seeing you seek fresh cause for alarm where a sensible lad

would find work with which to shut out these sights."

"Now you are angry, as is the sergeant and Darius."

"Is it strange, Nicholas? I could understand your terror between-decks; but now it seems little less than wilfulness. This man has the appearance of one who suffers," and Robert bent over the master of the ship, who was yet lying where the old soldier had left him.

"I think he is choking," Nicholas replied, much as if such a fact was no concern of his.

"Why did you not untie the rope?"

"Because it was put there by the colonel's orders, and I did not dare to interfere."

"It would have been better had you been as careful this morning while we were facing the mutineers. He was gagged lest he dishearten the men by revealing the true situation of affairs, but now there is no longer that danger, and I will relieve him."

The boy had suited the action to the words, and the look on the captain's face when the rope was removed, told of the relief which had been afforded.

The master of the Golden Pippin was no longer under the influence of liquor, but spoke like one in possession of all his senses, as he asked:

"What is being done?"

“A line was carried ashore some time since, and the men are being set on dry land so rapidly that in half an hour more the task will have been accomplished,” Robert replied.

“Where is Colonel Putnam?”

“In the cabin, that is the first opportunity he has had of satisfying his hunger. It is through him only that we have a means of gaining the land.”

“Ay, lad, and no punishment will be too great for me. There is yet work to be done, and I would have a share in it. Will you pray the colonel that I be released?”

“I will tell him what you say, sir,” and Robert went below, hardly expecting to be successful in the effort, because the captain’s behavior in time of danger had been little less than a crime.

“Yes, you may cast him adrift,” Colonel Putnam said when the lad repeated to him what had been said. “It would serve him right if we left the scoundrel here to go down with the ship; but I suppose that would be a bit too harsh. Cast off the ropes; but advise him to keep out of my sight, for I shall bring him up for punishment once we are ashore, if he loiters around our camp. How goes on the landing?”

“It would seem as if all should be ashore in half an hour more, sir.”

“Say to Major Bridges that the arms and ammunition must be taken on the rafts before all our force has left the ship. It will be a good idea for him to send a small portion at a time, and then in case of an accident we shall not lose the whole. Now that the dangers of the sea have been met and vanquished, we should be in readiness to confront the enemy, who may be near at hand.”

Until this moment Robert had lost sight of the fact—that they were landing on Spanish territory, and might find themselves prisoners before having well got free from the perils of the sea.

He ran with all speed to the major, repeated the colonel’s words, and then liberated the master of the ship, who, after thanking him for the service rendered, took passage for the shore on the next raft which put off, without making any attempt to save even his personal property.

Then it was that Robert turned his attention to Nicholas once more, entreating the boy not to show his cowardice when all could see him, but to put on a bold front, now the danger was passed, lest he become a laughing-stock for his companions-in-arms.

It seemed impossible for the lad to arouse himself from the fever of terror which held possession of all his faculties, and Robert went to the sergeant for advice.

The old soldier and Darius had worked most industriously from the time the raft-building was begun, and they were yet at their nearly-completed task when Robert told his story.

“There will be little loss if we leave him aboard,” Sergeant Prout said petulantly when the lad ceased speaking. “Such a crazy coward as he can be of no service as a soldier, an’ I’m certain he’s not fit for a sailor, so why should we turn a hair to keep him ashore.”

“But surely you wouldn’t abandon the poor lad to the waves?”

“It would be the best fate that could overtake him. He’ll not only disgrace himself, but us, if we save him.”

“You’ll help me get him ashore?” and Robert turned to Darius. “He is our comrade, and we would be worse cowards than he if we failed to lend a helping hand.”

“Here, here, lad, I am not quite so bad as my words would cause you to believe,” Sergeant Prout cried as he dropped the ax he had been using, and came forward. “Of course we won’t leave the lad to drown, though as a matter of fact I believe that end would be best for him. Show me where he is, an’ I’ll engage he goes ashore with the next raft.”

“I doubt if he will do so of his own free will, so great is his fear.”

“Then we’ll bind him hand and foot, and load him on as a part of the cargo.”

“You’ll not treat him roughly?” and Robert laid hold of the skirts of the sergeant’s coat to detain him.

“No more than is necessary to make certain of his goin’ ashore. Even though the passage can be made so readily, there is but little time left us to leave the wreck, as you may judge by the poundin’ of the waves, therefore our coward must be rescued soon, or not at all.”

The sergeant did not linger to discuss the matter. He had been searching the deck with his eyes, and immediately upon finding Nicholas, strode aft at a rapid pace.

The boy saw him coming, and made as if to escape; but the old soldier cried angrily:

“Have a care, Nicholas Vallet, have a care how you play with me, or the dangers of the sea will seem as nothin’ by the time I have finished my work on your body. But for its bein’ what some would call murder, I’d tie a cannon ball to your neck an’ drop you over the rail, therefore it is reasonable to suppose I shan’t stand on soft words if you go contrary to my orders.”

“I’m not doing anything to disgruntle you!” Nicholas cried with a whine.

“And you’d better not, for my mood isn’t a cheerful one after all you’ve done. March forward and take your place on the raft that’s alongside.”

“I could never get on it alive! I should drown!”

“You cowardly coward!” Sergeant Prout cried angrily, and suddenly seizing a length of rope which lay on the deck at his feet, he began using it like a whip on Nicholas, and with as much force as he could bestow.

Now the lad had good cause for the fear he displayed; every blow was most painful, and not one missed the mark, however rapidly he ran about the deck.

“Over with you on to the raft, or I’ll flay you alive!” the sergeant cried angrily, and now that his temper was thoroughly aroused, Robert really feared he would literally carry the threat into execution.

Smarting with pain, and intent only on escaping further and worse punishment, Nicholas so far forgot his fear of the sea as to leap over the rail on the raft, where he stood rubbing his bruised limbs and trying exceedingly hard to keep the tears from his eyes.

“I’ll pay you off some day!” he shouted, shaking

his clenched fist in impotent rage. "I'll give you as good as you've given me!"

"Now you're showin' proper spirit," the sergeant said with a laugh, his anger fading away as that of Nicholas arose. "If you'd been as sharp to show yourself a man before leavin' New Rochelle, this little lesson wouldn't have been needed."

Then the old soldier turned to his work again, and Darius and Robert labored at his side until Captain Lispenard ordered them to take their places on the raft.

"We're willin' to wait till all the others have gone ashore, sir," the sergeant said as he saluted, but at the same time he went toward the rail lest it should seem he hesitated to obey a command.

"You three are the only ones left on board, save the officers. The weapons, ammunition, a goodly supply of stores, and, in fact, everything we have time to save has been taken off. Colonel Putnam gave orders that you three be allowed to remain until the last, that honor having been gained by your conduct since the storm began, and I am proud that you are in my command."

The sergeant saluted yet more stiffly, drew himself up with an air of pride, and walked deliberately toward the rail.

“There are none left on board save commissioned officers,” he said after looking around scrutinizingly, “and not many of them. We are among the very last to leave, lads, and the colonel has given us a brave reward.”

“It has come none too soon,” Darius cried with a laugh as a wave broke over the port rail. “The tide must be well up, and the ship won’t live many minutes after the sea begins to strike such blows as that.”

Some of the younger officers, alarmed by the quivering of the hulk as the heavier waves beat against the sides, ran hastily to the raft; but Sergeant Prout did not quicken his pace, and the boys were careful to copy his movements exactly.

Therefore it was that these three were very nearly the last to leave the wreck, Colonel Putnam and Major Bridges only being behind them.

It was the sergeant who stood ready to aid the colonel when he leaped from the rail, and the latter said as he grasped the old soldier’s hands: —

“Prout, I’ve always known you as a true man; but never till last night did I fully realize your worth. You and the two lads have rendered me great service.”

“If we’ve done our duty, sir, we’re proud.”

“You have done even better, and if we come out

of this campaign alive, I'll see to it you have a fitting reward."

"You can never do more for us, sir, than when you allowed us to remain on board till you were ready to leave. That is something we'll be glad to remember."

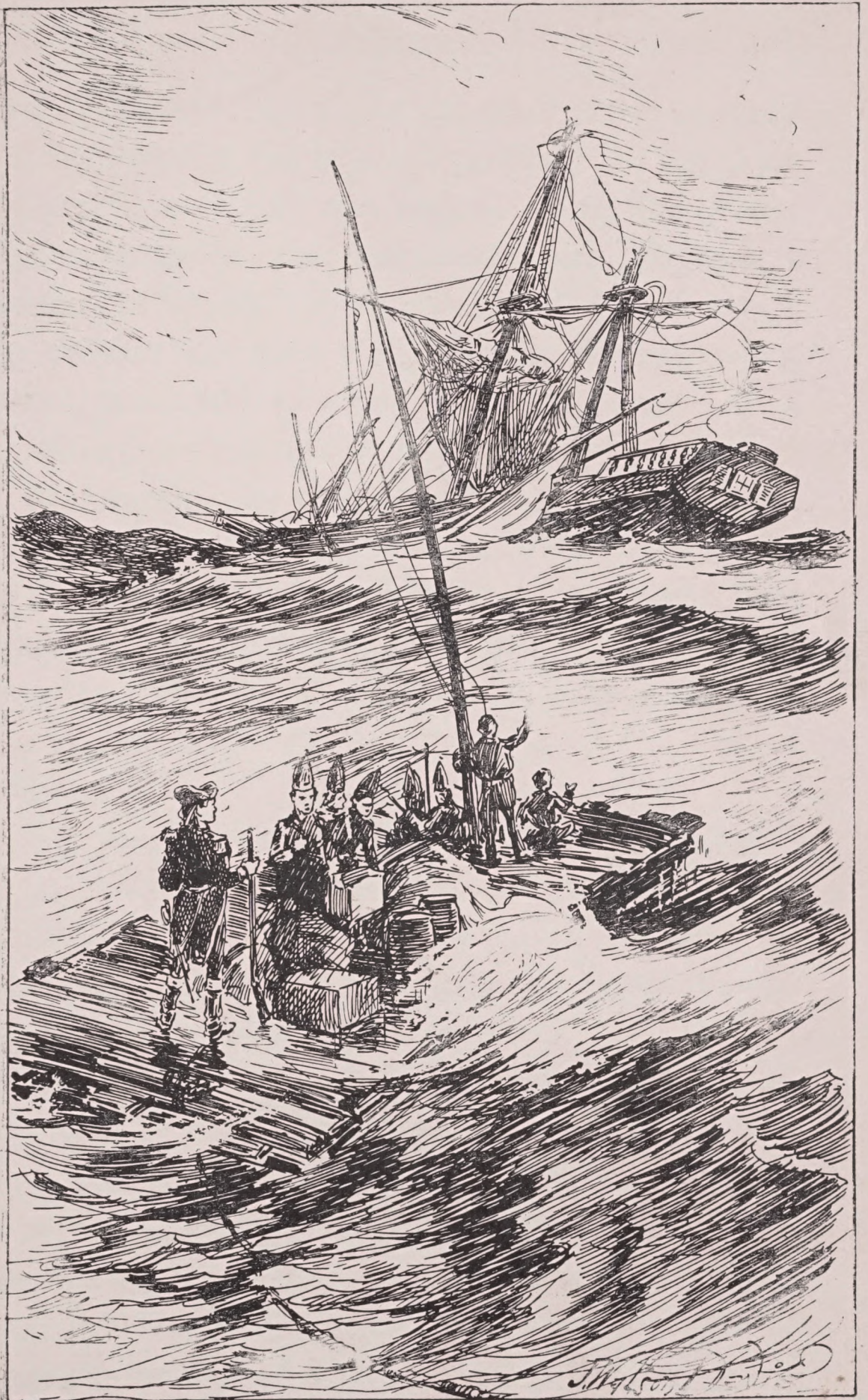
It was no time for compliments. At any moment the hulk might be forced off the ledge, and if the raft was too near at such times it would most certainly be destroyed.

The line was cut adrift from the rail, and as many as could gain a hold upon the hawser began hauling the clumsy craft toward the shore.

Once the rope was severed the wind had a better hold upon the raft, and forced it from this side to that until there was every danger the spars would be wrenched from their fastenings. All on board were half submerged the greater portion of the time; but such inconvenience was unheeded after the great peril that had been averted.

Already was there the semblance of a military camp when the last raft-load came ashore. The company officers had gotten their men into line, and stationed them here and there in regular formation until the commander should give his orders.

Robert was surprised at the quantity of goods



“A mighty shout went up from the men as they caught the last glimpse of the Golden Pippin.”—Page 120.

At the Siege of Havana.

which had been saved ; he expected to see a supply of ammunition, but was not prepared for the store of provision which was ranged along the beach. Ignorant as he was concerning such matters, it seemed to him as if there was enough on the beach to provide the men with food for several weeks, when, as a matter of course, there was no more than would serve them with half rations for four days.

It was while he stood surveying the stores and wondering how the recruits had found time or opportunity to break out so much of the cargo, that a mighty shout went up from the men, and, following the direction in which they were gazing intently, he caught the last glimpse of the Golden Pippin.

The sea had forced up her decks, and as he gazed, a gigantic wave literally rolled her over and over. During a brief instant it was possible to make out the dark lines of her keel amid the green waters, and then she disappeared forever.

The last tie which held this portion of the expedition to their native land was crushed out ; and in an enemy's country, poorly supplied with provisions and scantily provided with ammunition, it seemed in the highest degree doubtful they could maintain the foothold which had been won after so much suffering and labor.

Perhaps Colonel Putnam understood that the scene which had just been witnessed by his soldiers was well calculated to dishearten them, for the Golden Pippin had no more than been engulfed by the raging waters when he shouted cheerily:—

“Nothing will be gained by allowing the troops to remain idle when there is so much to be done, gentlemen. See to it at once that an encampment is formed, by using such materials as may be most convenient, in the building of huts to protect them from the sun. There is work in plenty for every man, and no shirking will be tolerated. Time enough for rest after we are in condition to do so properly. Major Bridges, see to it that a constant watch be maintained for such wreckage as may be washed ashore. We should yet be able to come upon a goodly store of provisions.”

Immediately all was activity. A certain number of the men were sent to gather branches of trees and small bushes; others were detailed to make huts such as would protect them from the burning rays of the sun, and yet more were ordered to the shore.

Among this last detachment were Sergeant Prout and the two lads.

Nicholas had not been seen since they landed, and Robert would have asked permission from Captain Lispenard to search for him, but that the old soldier

sternly forbade his "makin' such a fool of himself."

"Let the lad sulk; it will do him good. I was pleased to see he still had spirit enough to turn on me while I was floggin' him, an' a bit of anger now may serve to make him more manly."

"I can't see the master of the ship, or the mates. It may be that Nicholas will fall in with them, and be tempted into wrong-doing."

"Don't be afeered they'll have anything to do with such a coward as he'd soon show himself to be. I doubt if there are three others on this whole island who'd have borne with the lad as long as we've managed to do. That shipmaster will give the encampment a wide berth from this out, if he has any sense, otherwise he'll answer to the colonel for desertin' his duty by takin' to drink when he was most needed."

"Colonel Putnam will have his hands full without trying to punish any one for disobedience or neglect of duty," Darius said with a sigh. "Has it struck you, sergeant, that at this very minute we may be surrounded by Spaniards, and, having escaped the perils of the sea, we shall fall into the hands of the enemy?"

"Of course it has struck me the enemy may be close by; but fallin' into their hands is another matter."

“Except for the crew of the ship, who can’t be counted on to fight, we number but five hundred.”

“That’s certain enough, an’ now Nicholas has given us the slip again, we’re one short of the number that went aboard at New York.”

“If a thousand of the enemy were to come suddenly, what would save us from capture?”

“Ourselves, lad. Do you reckon we’d stand idle while they was workin’ their will?”

“Certainly not; but what could be effected if they outnumbered us?”

“Effected? Why, we’d turn to an’ whip the whole boilin’, of course. Do you count on lettin’ them work their will on us?”

“I’m told they fight well.”

“So they do, lad, but I’m reckonin’ we can fight better, so there’s no reason to borrow trouble on that score. ’Twixt now an’ to-morrow night I calculate Israel Putnam will know pretty nigh where the enemy is, an’ we can depend on him to keep us out of any very serious trouble.”

Darius was not so confident of the ability of their commander to perform marvelous deeds, and the expression of anxiety did not leave his face until Robert espied a cask drifting shoreward, when immediately he, in common with his companions, was intent upon securing the prize.

Until noon these three were occupied with such work, and during that time they had saved from the sea much that would be of benefit to the castaways if the stay on this portion of the shore was prolonged.

Beef, pork, meal, and twenty or more tents were piled high upon the beach beyond reach of the waves, and then the detachment was relieved from duty for the time being.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MISSION.

WHEN they were off duty Darius proposed that they set about putting up something in the way of a shelter for themselves, not because it would be needed to shield them from the cold, but to protect them from the burning rays of the sun.

A certain number of camps had already been built, and many of the men, not content with the prospect of being crowded when they lay down at night, more especially while material for building was so plentiful, were erecting small shelters for themselves, or sufficiently large to accommodate two or three comrades.

“We four—for of course Nicholas will come in after a while—had best mess by ourselves, and since we had more to do with saving the tents than any one else, I can’t see why we’re not entitled to one.”

“I reckon the explanations would come soon enough if you should lay hold of anything we saved from the waves,” the sergeant said grimly in reply

to Darius' remark. "Them 'ere tents will be kept for the use of the officers, an' us bloomin' privates can think we're well off to get what brush may be needed for a shanty."

"You're an officer," Robert suggested.

"Nothin' of any account, lad. A sergeant don't cut any great figger alongside a captain or lieutenant, so you can make certain a canvas tent ain't for the likes of me. We'll put up what'll serve us in the way of a camp, an' feel that we're fortunate in bein' allowed to flock together, instead of bein' herded with the rest. Now——"

"Sergeant, the colonel wants to speak with you at once," a soldier interrupted, as he came up and saluted in proper fashion.

"You lads can go ahead with the work, an' I reckon it won't be long before I'm back again," the old man said, as he brushed some of the sand from his uniform, made certain his coat was buttoned, and otherwise did his best at "sprucing up" before presenting himself to the commanding officer.

Then he walked rapidly away, and the two boys, wearied by the labor already performed, had little desire to act immediately upon his suggestion.

"It won't take long to put up such a shanty as will satisfy us, and we may as well wait a spell,"

Darius said as he threw himself upon the sand beneath the shadow of a tree.

“I’d rather have a look around for Nicholas, if there’s nothing better to do,” and Robert searched the encampment with his eyes for the missing lad.

“You’ve got something better to do, and that is to gain rest. We’ve been on the move, or what amounted to the same thing, ever since the mutiny began, and I’m well-nigh tired out. If Nicholas Vallet wants to play the fool, it’s no concern of ours.”

“As to that you are mistaken, Darius, and I am certain you would not speak thus save for your weariness. Nicholas is our comrade——”

“He may have been ; but such a coward as he has shown himself to be is not called comrade by me.”

“You would not be thought only a fair-weather friend, Darius Lunt! It is our duty to lend the poor fellow a helping hand, and since he showed that he *could* play a man’s part, as he did while the mutiny was going on, it may be we can bring him around to where he belongs. I do not believe it is possible for him, unaided, to hold himself in check.”

“And I believe that a dozen lads like us could not give as much assistance as is needed to keep him in proper trim. He is a rank coward, and shows even more plainly that such is the case when he

claims it is impossible to prevent a display of poltroonery.”

Having thus spoken Darius stretched himself out at full length in the shade, as if the matter had been fully settled, so far as he was concerned ; but Robert was not minded to leave the lad whom he had once called a “ comrade,” to his own devices.

“ I shall make search for Nicholas,” he said firmly. “ Should the sergeant come before I get back, you can tell him I could not take my ease while the lad remained in hiding like an outcast.”

As if fearful his friend might attempt to dissuade him from his purpose, Robert walked swiftly away, directing his steps toward the densest portion of the thicket which surrounded the encampment, for it was reasonable to suppose Nicholas would endeavor to screen himself from view.

It was destined, however, that he should not carry into effect his kindly intentions. Before he had passed out of the encampment he was brought to a sudden stand-still by hearing his name called in an imperative tone.

“ Robert Clement, where are you goin’ at such a pace ? ”

It was the sergeant who spoke, and, turning back with the air of one who is ashamed of his errand, the lad made answer :—

“It was in my mind to search for Nicholas, Sergeant Prout. I fear the lad may stray so far from the encampment as to imperil his life.”

The old soldier stepped back a pace as if he would the better see the lad's face, and said in a tone which was at the same time sharp and friendly :—

“The coward has at last found an opportunity to desert, and it is not for you to concern your head about him until orders have been given to such effect.”

“But, Sergeant Prout,” and Robert looked thoroughly alarmed, “can it be that one is set down as a deserter who mayhap has gone no further than yonder thicket?”

“We are in front of the enemy now, lad, or, at least, have good reasons for supposing such to be the case, and there is a harsher meaning given to words than when we marched out of New Rochelle. He who answers not to his name at roll-call is in danger of being set down as a deserter, whatever his intentions. But we have no time to spend in conversation on such as Nicholas Vallet. Colonel Putnam has seen fit to entrust us with a dangerous mission, and he who would keep his own courage screwed up must not allow his thoughts to dwell on timorous folk.”

“A dangerous mission, sergeant? How can he,

who as you say, is most like surrounded by enemies, have any cause to send out messengers ? ”

“ It is because of our being surrounded by enemies that the commander needs the services of those upon whom he can fully rely, therefore has he come to us. ”

“ But to what end ? ” Robert asked sharply, for this long-winded method of imparting information was not to his liking.

“ You understand full well that it is important Colonel Putnam should have communication with my Lord Albemarle, or Admiral Sir George Pocock. ”

“ Ay, but how may that be brought about ? ”

“ It is for us three to decide, lad. When I presented myself to the colonel he was so good as to say, ‘ Sergeant Prout, among these five hundred men under my command you are the only one in whose loyalty to the king, fidelity to myself, and ability to perform a difficult mission, I can have perfect confidence. ’ You can well suppose, lad, that I saluted the colonel for those words as humbly as if Lord Albemarle himself had stood before me ; but I returned him no reply, lest he should be the longer delayed in making known what I was eager to hear. ”

“ If he delayed the matter as you are doing, Sergeant Prout, then I grant you had good cause for being impatient. It is now ten minutes or more

since you began to explain what was wanted of us, and are not yet come to the beginning of the story.”

“Your desire over-rides your soldierly qualities, Robert Clement; but I pardon you because I myself was in much the same frame of mind. Having thus begun with flattery, the colonel continued his speech to me by giving the gist of the whole business in precious few words. ‘I would communicate with the commander-in-chief of his majesty’s forces, and you, as I have said before, are the only one on whom I can rely. Choose your own companions, your own time of leaving the encampment, so that you linger not too long, and set out.’”

“Is it in his mind that we can make our way directly to the city of Havana, for there is where his majesty’s army must be by this time?” and the expression on Robert’s face told how thoroughly surprised, perhaps alarmed, he was at the prospect of sharing such a mission, for he had no doubt but that the sergeant intended he and Darius should be his comrades in this perilous undertaking.”

“Ay, lad, we are to make our way as best we can to where the king’s forces are now besiegin’ the Spanish city, but in what direction that may be Colonel Putnam had no more information than is already in our own empty heads. If the master of

the ship hadn't taken to his heels, we might have got such a course from him as would make our work the easier."

"The easier? I'm at loss to understand how it may be performed at all," and an expression of perplexity came over Robert's face. "You believe we are surrounded by the enemy?"

"Ay, lad, though I do not count they be very close to us."

"What matters whether it be one mile or twenty, if they stand between us and the army we would join?"

"It is not seemly, Robert Clement, that you should search in your mind for bugbears. The order has been given which sends us out something after the fashion of scouts, and he is a poor soldier who does his best to seek out all the difficulties in his way before starting."

This reproof silenced Robert, but did not give him any greater confidence in their ability to perform what seemed like an impossible task.

During such time as they conversed the two had been making their way toward where Darius was taking his ease after the fatigue of the day.

Robert was so excited, and in a certain degree angered, by the sergeant's speaking of this mission as if it had been an ordinary one, that he could not

wait for the old soldier to explain the proposed adventure.

“Colonel Putnam flattered Sergeant Prout until our old comrade believes it is possible for us three to make our way through the Spaniard’s lines, and gain communication with the king’s army in front of Havana,” Robert cried impetuously, and Darius, looking from one to the other as if doubting the evidence of his own senses, made no reply.

“You mistake, lad, when you say I believe it can be done. The order has been given, and as soldiers we have no choice but to obey.”

“Are we under orders to make our way to Havana?” Darius asked with an air of bewilderment, and the sergeant, not minded that the boys should have time to weigh well all the dangers in their path, replied sharply :—

“Such are the colonel’s commands, and it ill becomes us to stand here making idle talk after the word has once been given. See to it that your muskets are in proper shape. We’ll draw so much ammunition as can comfortably be carried, in addition to the provisions which we must perforce take along, and then set out, for time presses.”

“In which direction will you go?” Darius asked, still in a maze of doubt and wonder.

“We will decide after having had speech with

Colonel Putnam. Now let us waste no more time, for we should be many miles from here by sunset."

Darius looked up at Robert, as if asking whether he was willing to obey such an order, and the latter, interpreting the glance aright, said without hesitation:—

"If the command has been given it is not for us to question it, however great the danger. To my mind we shall fail in the undertaking, and be fortunate only if we escape captivity, for how may three persons, strangers in a country, and speaking not the language, make their way through an enemy's line?"

"We have had enough of that, Master Clement. You and Darius have been ordered to get your weapons in readiness and draw such provisions as can be comfortably carried. I will listen to no more discussion; we must set out within the hour."

"And we are going to our death as straightly as if a gallows-tree at the opposite end of the encampment was our destination," Darius replied mournfully; but the old soldier gave no sign that he heard the remark, and as he turned away another thought, one which caused him quite as much uneasiness as did the prospect of the perilous mission before them, came into Robert's mind.

"What of Nicholas?" he asked. "Surely we

cannot leave the poor fellow here to work his own undoing."

"Surely that is what we will do," the sergeant replied emphatically. "These recruits were brought here that they might fight for the king, and not to run hither and yon after such as are not only cowards, but fools."

"Do you mean that we must go without letting him know we have departed?" Robert asked in surprise.

"We are to set off, as I have said, within the hour, and unless that villainous Nicholas Vallet takes it into his head to come where we are, you will have little opportunity of speaking with him."

Just for an instant it seemed as if there were mutinous thoughts in Robert's mind; he stood like one who hesitates, turning first toward one quarter of the encampment and then the other, searching all the while with his eyes; and, understanding somewhat of that which was troubling him, the sergeant seized the lad firmly, yet not unkindly by the arm, as he said:

"This is not the time to give your thoughts free rein. Once you became the king's soldier it was for his officers to have command over your comings and goings. There is an important duty to be performed,

and no greater compliment could have been paid by the colonel than when he entrusted the work to us. It is for Nicholas Vallet to carve out his own fortunes or misfortunes, and for you to do whatsoever seemeth best in the eyes of those who are in command over you. Up to this moment you lads stand well with Colonel Putnam, because of what has been done, and it were little less than a crime to forfeit his good opinion for the sake of one like our coward, even though you might be of benefit to him. As the matter stands, however, I have many doubts whether you could come at him even though you searched in the vicinity of this encampment eight and forty hours. He has cast his lines with the drunken master of the Golden Pippin, and every fool will cling to his own folly.”

To Robert it seemed almost wicked to leave Nicholas to his own devices, and yet he had sufficient good sense to understand that the sergeant's words were wise—that he was in duty bound to act upon the suggestions given.

Therefore did he hold his peace as he marched two or three paces behind the old soldier and Darius, as the latter gave free expression to his opinion regarding the probable outcome of the adventure.

Sergeant Prout had devoted as much time to the discussion of the affair as he believed himself war-

ranted in doing, and now preparations for departure were made by him in silence, and with the least possible delay.

Having arrived at that place where the stores saved from the wreck were stacked up, he made a demand upon the quartermaster for such articles as it was believed would be needed during the journey, and made a careful inspection of the lads' muskets.

With the exception of the provisions and ammunition, it was Sergeant Prout's intention to "travel light," as he expressed it. The air was so sultry that no more than sufficient clothing to cover their nakedness would be required, and every article, however small, that could be dispensed with, was cast aside.

"It may so chance, lads, that we shall need to take to our heels before this venture has come to an end, and therefore we would be fools to burden ourselves with more than is absolutely necessary."

"I am not thinking we shall have so much as a chance to take to our heels," Darius said bitterly. "A blinder venture was never made in this world. Without knowing the direction in which to proceed, having no idea of the whereabouts of the enemy, save that they are close around on every hand, and without sufficient force to protect ourselves even though the

smallest squad of men should set upon us, we are going out only to be made prisoners, or killed."

"If it so be, lad, that you are determined to give tongue to such dismal thoughts, then you shall be left behind, and Robert and I will go on alone. It is cowardly to seek out dangers in advance, save as a brave man may when he would be in readiness to meet them, and I have no wish for a companion who at the outset has decided that we shall fail in our purpose."

"It may be decided that we shall fail, and yet serve you as well as another who wilfully overlooks the danger," Darius replied hotly, for the threat which Sergeant Prout had made alarmed him. At that moment, whatever the perils to be encountered, he would have insisted on remaining with his comrades, for nothing would have been more humiliating than to be set aside after once having been selected for the work.

Therefore it was that he ceased to speak of what might be encountered, and during the remainder of the preparations Sergeant Prout was the only member of the little company who indulged in conversation.

The weapons were looked to carefully. The ammunition pouches and horns were filled, flints were sharpened, and then as much in the way of provi-

sions as would suffice them for perhaps six moderate meals was packed in the haversack, which the sergeant himself carried.

“There is no reason why you should bear all the burden,” Robert cried as he saw that the old soldier was thus taking upon himself the greater portion of the outfit. “Surely Darius and I may add that which we shall eat, to our own loads.”

“I am better fitted for the work than either of you, for I have had much experience, and even if I took all your ammunition, then would we be no more than equal in the way of burdens, as compared with the ability of bearing them. Now, lads, one word more with Colonel Putnam, an’ we’re off.”

During all the time of preparation Robert had kept up an eager search with his eyes for Nicholas, but without seeing any sign of him. Now as they went toward that portion of the encampment where was set up the colonel’s tent his heart was heavy in his bosom, for there appeared to be no question but that the timorous lad must be left to his own devices, and among all the troops were none who would deal with him in such a friendly manner as Robert.

It was this thought which disturbed him as he and Darius stood side by side, waiting, and after a time Sergeant Prout led the way directly into the thicket, where the heat was most intense because

the foliage shut out every breath of wind. As they looked so far as might be into the gloomy recesses of what seemed little less than a jungle, the two boys firmly believed they saw directly in advance of them, and but a short distance away, either death or painful capture.

The sergeant, most likely in the hope of raising their spirits, began as soon as they were well clear of the encampment, to give them some idea of the conversation which he had held with the commander.

“The colonel allows that by travelin’ westward we should come upon the city, providin’ there are not too many Spaniards ’twixt here an’ there. The main point in my mind was gettin’ some idee of direction, for, from all I know of this bloomin’ island, I would have been as ready to go one way as another. Now the orders, or what we can take for orders, seein’s the colonel held to it he was only makin’ a suggestion, are that we keep due west to within sight of the sea, an’ then we’re bound to come out somewhere, even though we make a complete circuit of Cuba.”

“Are you counting on pushing ahead in this careless manner?” Darius asked with no slight show of nervousness. “Here we are in an enemy’s country, knowing that troops must be near about us, and making as much noise as a drove of steers.”

“It doesn’t stand to reason that we’ve got anything much to fear for an hour or more, at the least,” the sergeant replied with a laugh. “We are not above half a mile from the camp, and if there had been Spaniards within five miles of us, you could count on their havin’ shown themselves before this. The most I hope for is that we get well on toward their lines before dark, when we’ll camp, an’ consider the situation more at our leisure after sunrise. Now if all things go to our likin’——”

The sergeant ceased speaking very suddenly, for at that instant was heard a rustling among the foliage directly in advance of them, as of some heavy body forcing a passage, and the command to “stand ready” was not needed by the boys.

Instinctively the three clutched their weapons as they stood peering into the gloom of the forest, and the hearts of the two lads beat violently, for both believed the enemy to be close upon them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ENEMY.

THE three stood silent and motionless while one might have counted ten, and then it was apparent that the cause of the rustling among the foliage was moving further and further away each instant.

“It is better to be on guard against an imaginary danger, than to be caught nappin’ when your life depends upon your wits,” Sergeant Prout muttered as he lowered his musket. “Whoever is makin’ all that rumpus seems to be as much afraid of us as we are of him.”

“Then you believe it is a man?” Robert whispered, and the old soldier replied after some hesitation:—

“Yes, lad, I believe it is, an’ now that I come to think the matter over, it’s plain that we should know to a certainty all about yonder stranger.”

“Do you mean that you would follow him?” Robert asked, as the sergeant threw his musket over the hollow of his arm.

“That is the course in which our duty lays, lads,

so let's get to work before whoever may be ahead of us moves beyond sound of our ears.

Sergeant Prout started forward as he spoke, and Darius followed him, muttering discontentedly :—

“To my mind there is work in plenty to be done if we remain in the path marked out for us by the colonel. This jumping aside to gratify an idle curiosity when it may cost life, is not to my liking.”

“We are yet in the colonel's path, lad, when we are findin' out who may be ahead.”

“But suppose it is a Spanish soldier?” Robert ventured to suggest.

“Then can't you see that our task would be made easier, for by following him we should know where the enemy's outposts are like to be stationed?”

At this instant the rustling among the foliage suddenly ceased, and the old man came to a standstill, enjoining the boys by gestures to silence, until new sounds told that the unknown was advancing once more.

Sergeant Prout was not disposed to make a prolonged chase, and indeed he had good reason for bringing it to a speedy end, lest it should lead him and his companions so far into the enemy's lines that retreat would be impossible.

Robert and Darius did not consider themselves pupils in the study of woodcraft. Almost since

their earliest recollections had they been taught the art of still hunting, and it was not difficult to put this teaching into practise when the game was a human being.

It might not have been as simple a matter to thus track one who had had as much experience in woodcraft as themselves; but in this case it was evidently a novice who led the way, and no more than fifteen minutes had elapsed before an exclamation of mingled surprise and petulance burst from the sergeant's lips.

"What is it?" Robert whispered as he pressed forward, and the old soldier, coming to a full halt, exclaimed with the air of one who believes he has good cause for dissatisfaction:—

"No less a reptile than Nicholas Vallet."

"Nicholas? Here?" Robert and Darius exclaimed at the same instant, and then the former, an expression of joy coming over his face, shouted:—

"This way, Nicholas! Here with me are Sergeant Prout and Darius!"

There was no opportunity for Robert to speak further; the old soldier suddenly clapped his hand over the lad's mouth with as much earnestness of purpose as if the young deserter had been escorted by a full regiment of the enemy's troops.

As a matter of course Robert could not speak;

but Darius had full use of his tongue, and lost no time in questioning this, to him, singular behavior.

“Are you afraid of Nicholas Vallet?” he asked with a laugh, and in so loud a tone that the deserter himself must perforce have heard him.

It was useless for the sergeant to hold one of his companions speechless while the other was at liberty to give full rein to his tongue, and he unloosed Robert as he said with quite as much show of anger as the boys remembered ever having seen him display:—

“I am not certain but that I *am* afraid of such as he, for a coward is always dangerous to those with whom he consorts when peril is nigh at hand.”

“I cannot understand how such as he might do us harm,” Robert said, much as if speaking to himself, and the old soldier added sharply:—

“If such be the case then you have suddenly grown dull, Robert Clement. This coward will most likely insist on following us, rather than go back to the encampment where he must know punishment awaits him.”

Before Robert could reply, Nicholas, his face pale and distorted with fear, his clothing torn and stained with the slime and mud of the swamp, stood before him.

“Would you send me back in order that Colonel

Israel Putnam might take my life for what I was unable to prevent?" he cried in piteous, pleading tones, and the old soldier, steeling his heart to thoughts of previous friendship, replied sternly:—

"Ay, Nicholas Vallet, and even though you were my own brother I would *carry* you back that you might answer for your misdeeds."

The cowardly lad evidently believed the sergeant was about to do exactly as he had said, for he fell on his knees in front of Robert and Darius, imploring them to shield him from the consequences of his own acts.

"I should have run out of the cabin when we believed the ship was sinking, even though men with loaded muskets had stood in my path," he cried. "Is a lad to be killed because he has less courage than another?"

"You had no right to enlist unless you were prepared to do a soldier's full duty," the sergeant replied, his anger seemingly increasing rather than diminishing.

"I believed I should be able to do whatever might be required of me, and only when it was too late did I learn of my own timorousness. You two lads who have known me all my life, have seen nothing of the like before."

"It is because you never faced danger in their

company, else I will answer for it you would have shown the white feather quickly enough. But get on your feet and try to have the appearance of a man, if nothing more."

Nicholas obeyed tremblingly, and with dry lips asked falteringly:—

"Are you still bent on carrying me back where I must be punished for not being able to control myself?"

"Our lives would be the safer if that could be done; but we are not at liberty to waste time on even better men than you, Nicholas Vallet, therefore must fain take you with us, unless it be more to your liking to remain here."

"Remain here?" Nicholas screamed. "I have been wandering around since early in the day trying to find my way out of this thicket! To stay here would be to starve!"

"But we are bent on a mission so dangerous that, beside it, the wreck of the Golden Pippin is as nothing," the sergeant said grimly.

It is doubtful if Nicholas heard this last remark. He was so overjoyed at being with his comrades once more that he gave no heed to anything else.

Robert had taken from his pocket a crust of cornbread, and the young deserter clutched it like one who is famishing.

“Our supply of food was scant for three, should eight and forty hours be spent on the journey, an’ we’ll be on precious short allowance if four are to feed from it,” the old soldier said as, giving no further heed to Nicholas, he pushed forward once more, bending his steps toward the seashore, for the chase had led them at least two miles inland.

“You may deal out my share to me, Sergeant Prout, and I’ll divide it with Nicholas. By such means neither you nor Darius will be the sufferers,” and Robert pulled the hungry deserter toward him.

“It will be share an’ share alike, with no favors shown,” Sergeant Prout grumbled as he still further increased his pace, thus forcing the boys at unusual speed until conversation was well-nigh impossible.

In due time the little party were in sight of the sea again, and then, keeping well within the line of foliage, Sergeant Prout led the way in a westerly direction, moving with all proper precautions, yet swiftly, until the setting of the sun warned them that the moment had come when they should seek shelter from the heavy dew of the night.

More than once during this steady advance had Robert found opportunity of speaking words of cheer to the sad-visaged lad who pressed closely at his heels.

It was as if Darius desired it to be understood that he had no further interest in, or friendship for, Nicholas Vallet; as if he intended to show by his actions that all ties between them were broken, and so did the timorous lad himself understand it. He believed, and with good cause, that on all the island Robert Clement was the only one who would extend a helping hand because of the past.

When the sergeant came to a halt and faced about, it was toward Darius he looked, and to Darius he talked.

“Nothin’ will be gained by tryin’ to make our way in the darkness, when mayhap we are within a few hundred yards of the enemy. Here each should be able to find a shelter for himself until the day dawns; then we will push on once more.”

Then the sergeant opened the haversack, spread out on the sand all the food, which he divided into six portions, and yet further divided one of these parts four times.

“I’m allowin’ we’ll be knockin’ about here no less than eight an’ forty hours, an’ then we are either in the hands of the enemy, or with the king’s forces in front of Havana. If I have made a mistake, it’s a case of all hands goin’ hungry after the time set has passed, for here be six meals an’ no more.”

This said as if by way of grace, he replaced in the haversack all save the four small portions, and, taking up one himself, began the evening meal.

Nicholas did not venture to help himself, and, understanding full well why he should be thus backward, Robert placed in his hands the share that had been set aside for him.

Once the somewhat scanty repast had come to an end, Sergeant Prout appeared to mentally withdraw from his companions, and Robert Clement was in no pleasant frame of mind concerning the old soldier's unusual silence, for he feared that it had grown out of disapproval because of the friendly part he had attempted to play toward Nicholas.

Whatever may have been the cause, Sergeant Prout was extremely silent, when, having found shelter for himself under a clump of palmettos, he crept so far into the foliage that even in broad day one might have passed within a yard of his hiding-place without being aware of his presence.

Darius had a similar refuge a short distance away, and a few feet beyond him Robert and Nicholas lay side by side.

The night had come suddenly. It was as if a black shadow crept close behind the setting sun, shutting off its last rays, and when the golden radiance

could no longer be seen through the thicket, the darkness had fully come.

Once Darius would have spoken, but the old soldier checked him quickly, saying sharply :

“ It would not be well that we hold any converse, whether wise or foolish now, for we are within the enemy’s country, an’ who can say but that the Spaniards are close at hand.”

The night sounds of the forest rang in Robert’s ears until it was as if he heard a great humming and ticking ; at times he knew that his companion trembled—most likely with fear, and then he laid his hand upon the timorous lad’s face to give him courage.

Sleep would not come at his bidding ; the moments passed exceedingly slow, and when it seemed to him as if the night must be half spent he heard a rustling amid the leaves a short distance away, which at first alarmed him ; but he soon came to understand that the old soldier was rising to his feet.

Then he fancied he heard the sergeant move cautiously away, and he listened eagerly for some sound which would tell of his return.

The fact that it seemed necessary he should keep his eyes open brought the desire for slumber, and soon he was wrapped in unconsciousness, knowing

nothing more until aroused by the pressure of a hand upon his mouth.

It was daybreak, and Sergeant Prout bent over him, also guarding in like fashion against the possibility of Nicholas' crying out.

"We have found the outposts of the enemy, lads, an' they are not above two hundred yards from here," the old soldier whispered, and even in his surprise at such information, Robert heeded the fact that Nicholas did not display evidences of fear by trembling, now when the danger seemed so great. "I did a little reconnoiterin' last night on my own account, an' come mighty nigh runnin' plump on the whole crowd. If it so be we are to keep on in the direction the colonel pointed out, we've got some delicate work 'twixt now an' sunset, unless we're willin' to give up our liberty. There's three or four hundred Spaniards camped out here, an' it looks to me as if they were on the march, in which case the job cut out for us won't be so hard; but if it so happens they don't move to-day, we must do some lively dancin'."

Now understanding that both the lads were awake and fully sensible of the situation, the sergeant released his hold of their mouths, and gave to each his portion of the rations which had been allotted for breakfast.

Not until the meal had come to an end did the old man speak again, and then it was to say in the friendliest of tones, addressing himself as much to Nicholas as to the other lads :

“ You are dull scholars if there is to be any trouble in gettin’ through the enemy’s lines while the thicket is as dense as it is around here. I’m allowin’ all of you have been out with old Sam Bassett, the best woodsman that ever trapped or hunted in the province of New York, and one day spent with him should have been enough to tell you how we must work now. I’ll take the lead, Robert Clement shall bring up the rear, and if it so be that one, or two, or even three of us are nabbed, him or them as are free shall continue straight on in the flight without regard to whosoever may have been captured. It is necessary Lord Albemarle should know where Colonel Putnam and his men are, and if in carrying the word one out of the four gets through alive, the blood of the others will be no great price to pay for the service.”

Robert glanced hurriedly toward Nicholas, and to his surprise saw no sign of fear on the lad’s face. He was pale, and so, also, was Darius; but that might be set down to excitement, for surely at that instant the nerves of all the lads were strained to their utmost tension.

They had come to the hazardous portion of the venture, where they must make their way stealthily through the enemy's lines, and perhaps after doing so would find that they had but come upon another and a larger portion of the force.

It was not a task which even an experienced soldier like the sergeant could look forward to cheerfully, and Robert wondered all the more why Nicholas was apparently so calm when it seemed as if he himself was in a fever of excitement and apprehension.

Perhaps the sergeant understood that he was not strengthening the courage of the boys by allowing them to remain inactive after they once understood that the dangerous advance was to be made, for now he hastened their movements by setting out in advance, after having repeated again that they were to follow as nearly as might be in his footsteps, and that should any be captured those who were free to fly must think only of the necessity of carrying the information of Colonel Putnam's whereabouts to the English camp.

During the two hours or more which followed it was to Robert rather as if he was in a dream, than playing the part of a soldier. He tried to shut out from his mind every thought save that of copying the sergeant's movements, and to close his ears to

all sounds except the light rustling made by those in advance.

Never once did he turn his head in either direction, fearing lest he might see that which would unnerve him, and all the while was he expecting to feel the sting of a bullet, or see one of his comrades sink senseless to the earth.

Silently as shadows the four flitted from one point of concealment to the other, necessarily making a zigzag course, and the time had come when Robert believed all danger was passed, at least from that particular body of troops which the sergeant had discovered during the night. Then, suddenly, the old soldier was confronted by a huge negro, who leaped out from the thicket on one side, and would have struck him down with a single blow, but that the sergeant, getting a glimpse of the shadow rather than the adversary himself, had sprung sufficiently out of the line of attack to save himself from a death thrust.

Robert instinctively raised his weapon to fire, for in his mind now was much the same idea as if his comrade had been attacked by a wild beast, but before he could discharge it another negro leaped out from the same place of concealment directly upon Darius.

It was no longer possible to shoot without danger



“It was none other than Nicholas Vallet, the coward, who sprang forward with musket upraised and brought it down upon the scoundrel’s head.”—Page 157.
At the Siege of Havana.

of hitting a friend instead of an enemy, and for the merest fraction of time Robert stood with leveled musket, undecided what course to pursue; but short as that time was it might have been sufficient for the undoing of the old soldier had no one else been near to lend a helping hand.

It was none other than Nicholas Vallet, the coward, who sprang forward with musket upraised like a club, and as the murderous negro would have plunged his knife-like sword into Sergeant Prout's momentarily unprotected chest, he brought the weapon down upon the scoundrel's head.

"That's what I call a timely blow, lad!" the old soldier exclaimed as he staggered against the trunk of a palm, for he was on the point of falling when Nicholas had so opportunely made the attack. "It was a timely blow, an' I am free to confess you've saved my life!"

The second negro, seeing the fate of his comrade, had wheeled suddenly about and plunged into the thicket before either Darius or Robert could discharge their weapons, and it was reasonable to suppose word would be carried to the nearest Spanish force that four white men—most likely English—were making their way along the coast.

"We can't stop for many words now," the sergeant said as he grasped Nicholas' hand. "It be-

hooves us to push on at our best speed, now the enemy is like to be warned that we are in this vicinity. Come on, lads, an' if it so be I give the name of coward to Nicholas Vallet again, you may set me down as a simple who wilfully forgets a debt."

CHAPTER X.

THE BESIEGERS.

AGAIN the old soldier led the way through the thicket to within a few yards of the coast line, and once more the three lads trudged behind him, copying his every movement so exactly that it was, so far as one who saw the trail might say, as if a single person had passed that way.

Outwardly matters were much as they had been the day previous. There was a decided change, however, in the current of thought, at least, in so far as three of the party were concerned, as was seen when a halt had been called after half an hour's rapid traveling.

When the softly spoken word from Sergeant Prout had brought them to a standstill, Nicholas and Robert were several yards in the rear, and Robert said with the air of one whose words are but a continuation of a long train of thought:

“How is it, Nicholas, that at one hour you are so cowardly, and at another so brave?”

“When, ever since we left New Rochelle, have I

shown any symptom of bravery?" Nicholas asked in surprise.

"What name do you give to that act by which you saved Sergeant Prout's life?"

"I cannot well say; but of this I am certain. However much the sergeant may praise me, it was no more and no less than that which you have good reason to call cowardice. I could not have prevented myself from leaving the hold of the Golden Pippin when I believed she was sinking, nor could I have returned to camp once I had run like a cur into the thicket. When the black man leaped upon Sergeant Prout with knife uplifted, I could no more have saved myself from rushing forward, than when I left you amid the mutineers."

"But surely a lad may elect which he shall do, run forward or backward," Robert said in a tone of perplexity.

"So it may seem to you," Nicholas replied sadly, "and I know not how the matter may be explained; yet this much is certain: That the last act of mine which all of you are pleased to praise, is not one whit different from those that have disgraced and set me apart as a lad not fit to associate with his fellows."

"I do not understand it," Robert said half to himself, and Nicholas added:

“Nor do I, and yet I have told you only the truth.”

There was no opportunity for further conversation. By gestures Sergeant Prout gave the word for the little party to move on once more, and the march was resumed in silence.

Not until noon did the old soldier call another halt, and then it was indeed time the lads had opportunity for rest.

They had forced their way through the interwoven foliage until their clothing was in tatters, and the long lines of vivid red on the naked skin, moistened continually by the perspiration which oozed from every pore, looked angry, as if about to break into festering sores.

Their hands and faces were bleeding; the fatigue of the long, uninterrupted, difficult march was so great as to be almost overpowering, and when at last the welcome command “halt” was given, the lads sank down upon the damp, fetid mass of decaying vegetation as if unable to remain longer in a standing posture.

Sergeant Prout divided the third portion of food into four parts; but when this had been distributed no one ate.

“Come, come, lads,” the old soldier said, as he forced himself to swallow a mouthful. “This will

never do, if we count on performing our mission. He who does not eat cannot travel, and there may yet be many miles before us."

"I have no desire for anything but a draught of cool water such as comes from the spring hard by where my mother sits, most likely thinking this minute of me," Robert said slowly and sadly.

It was as if these words aroused the old soldier to wrath; for he exclaimed vehemently:

"Look here, lad, there must be no thoughts of home at such a time as this! Put far from your mind remembrances of the spring at New Rochelle, and think only that, as a soldier, you must push forward on your mission until it is accomplished, whatever may come afterwards. Keep well in mind the fact that we are on the island of Cuba, making our way to the besieged city for the purpose of sending succor to that troop of five hundred which was put ashore from the wreck of the Golden Pippin—that you were sent out to save their lives."

"If the distance is much greater, it will hardly be possible to save our own lives, for I am well-nigh done," Darius said despondently. "This tangle of creeping vines and thorny leaves, beneath which is naught save a mass of decaying stuff, bears little likeness to the forests of New York province. There I could travel day after day without feeling

more fatigue than was good for me; but here it is as if all my strength had departed."

"You may lay that to the score of the heat, lad. I know well, because of having been here before, how it pulls down the strongest who are not accustomed to it," Sergeant Prout said as he gazed at the boys with a troubled look in his eyes. "Now is the time when all your courage is needed. Now you must fight against inclination to loiter or halt, and in doing that right manfully, as I know you can, we shall accomplish our mission."

"How may it be if we are traveling in the wrong direction?" Robert asked despondently.

"It is not for us to say such is the case. Hold the thought in your minds that every foot of advance brings us so much nearer the English army; that by our exertions now we are savin' mayhap the lives of five hundred brave fellows who await the succor which we shall send, and do whatsoever is in your power to husband strength. Eat the rations, and after a halt of an hour we will push ahead once more."

During this time Nicholas had spoken no word; he ate his portion of the food, not with the air of one who craves it, but much as if taking a nauseous draught, and appeared of the four the most willing to continue the arduous march.

Before thirty minutes had passed the sergeant came to understand that it would be unadvisable to make a halt of an hour as he had first proposed, because of the fact that not only his companions but himself were rapidly becoming unfitted for further exertions, and suddenly leaping to his feet with an ill-assumed air of hilarity, he exclaimed:—

“This will never do, lads! My old joints are stiffenin’ so fast that if we stop many moments longer it’ll be impossible for me to push on. So far we have had marvelous good fortune, for certain it is that we have made our way through half a regiment of Spaniards without being detected, and we’ll believe that was an omen of success. Have courage now, an’ who shall say but that when we next halt it will be within the lines of the English army.”

Nicholas was the first to obey this command, and the others soon were on their feet, although not without considerable difficulty.

“You can eat as we march,” the sergeant said, observing that Robert and Darius still held in their hands the food which had been portioned out. “Try to swallow it, lads, for it will serve to keep your stomachs in proper shape, and mayhap we will soon come across a spring where we can quench our thirst.”

Again the old soldier led the wearisome march,

and the boys followed as best they might, having a certain heed to their steps during two or three hours. Then it was as if all walked blindly, stumbling here and there ; sometimes falling, when, save for assistance, they might not have had sufficient will to struggle to their feet again ; but ever pressing on in the right direction.

Had any one looked scrutinizingly into Sergeant Prout's face when this second day of the journey was nearly at an end, it would have been said that the old soldier was on the extreme verge of exhaustion—that he could not keep even the semblance of the pace an hour longer, but yet he staggered on until the sun went down—on, when the night had fully come, knowing only too well that once another halt was made it would be many hours before the toilsome tramp could be resumed.

Now that the darkness had come the leader boldly made his way out on to the shore where, unhampered by the clinging vines and thorny leaves, the messengers from Colonel Putnam were able to make their way with less difficulty, although it is doubtful if they were conscious of the fact.

Onward, yet onward they pressed, hardly aware of the fact. It was to Robert as if he had for many hours been under the influence of some hideous nightmare, when a cry from the leader startled him

out of the stupor of fatigue which had weighed so heavily upon him.

“We have arrived, lads! We have arrived!” the old soldier shouted, and his companion leaped forward as if electrified. “Yonder lights are in the English camp! We have done our duty, an’ more than that no soldier can do.”

Now when it seemed certain they were come to their journey’s end, and the fatigue, and thirst, and horrible nightmares were in the past, the lads began to grow suspicious.

“How might you say that is the English camp?” Darius asked petulantly. “Can you see the color of the uniforms at this distance?”

“There is no need, lad, to strain one’s eyes when the truth is shown so plainly. What other city on this island is besieged?”

“And how know you this one is?”

“Look here, and there, and yonder! Can you not say for a surety an army is set down in front of that city?”

“I could not even make up my mind whether those lights came from the encampment, or from a portion of the town itself.”

“Then take my word for it, lad. We are come to Havana, and ere twenty minutes be passed I’ll answer for it we are hailed by English outposts.”

Darius would have discussed the matter despite his extreme fatigue, fearing lest they might be running into danger of capture ; but that Sergeant Prout moved forward, joyful now, and the lads followed him perforce.

Ten minutes later came the welcome cry in English of " Who goes there ? " and the old soldier replied in a voice so full of thanksgiving that his companions understood now, if never before, how great had been his anxiety :—

" Friends ! Thank God ! Friends, who have been wrecked on the transport Golden Pippin, from the province of New York in North America ! "

Before another half hour had passed the mission with which these four had been entrusted was accomplished and they were sleeping the sleep so dearly earned, in a tent hard by Lord Albemarle's headquarters, which had been vacated by its rightful occupants for their especial benefit under orders from the commander-in-chief.

When the boys awakened next day they were alone. The sergeant had evidently stolen out, while they were asleep.

" He made his report last night, and if nothing save curiosity has taken him from his bed, then I am free to say he is foolish," Darius exclaimed, as, raising himself on his elbow, he made certain the

old soldier was not in the tent. "So far as I am concerned, four and twenty hours will be none too long a time to rest after that hideous tramp through the thicket."

Neither Robert nor Nicholas made reply to this remark, for slumber was yet heavy upon their eyelids, and more to be desired than conversation.

Darius' head sank back upon the billet of wood which served as pillow, and it was as if he had hardly spoken before his heavy breathing told that he was in the unconsciousness of slumber once more.

When next the boys awakened it was to see Sergeant Prout sitting moodily near the flap of the tent, an expression of deepest concern on his face as he regarded them fixedly.

"What is it?" Robert asked, leaping up, for the thought that danger might be near at hand suddenly banished sleep.

"Nothing that we can remedy, lad, and nothing of which, perhaps, I should speak."

"You should surely give words to that disturbance which can so plainly be seen by your face, unless it is something to be kept secret."

By this time Darius and Nicholas were sitting upright, looking questioningly at the sergeant.

"No, lad, it's no secret; but something which you all can see readily once you move about the encamp-

ment. Although it seems impossible such could be the case, the Spaniards have well-nigh raised the siege."

"Do they outnumber the king's forces?" Robert asked breathlessly.

"That cannot be said with any certainty. On paper the English army is large, now all the transports from the North American provinces, save the Golden Pippin, have arrived. When Israel Putnam's forces come up the besiegers will number little less than 16,000 men, an' yet I am just told by an old comrade who is servin' in the Royal Artillery, that no less than five thousand soldiers and three thousand sailors are stricken down this day by sickness."

Robert looked at the old sergeant with eyes wide open and staring, as if believing he had not heard the words aright.

"It is your meaning, Sergeant Prout, that out of the army of sixteen thousand, eight thousand are on the sick list?"

"So I am told, lad, an' by one who is not given to makin' the worst of a bad matter. A relative of his is among the surgeons, an' the information cannot be other than correct."

"And you say all the troops from the provinces have arrived, save those who embarked on the Golden Pippin?"

“Ay, lad, the last one came in yesterday. There is a rumor around the camp that the Spaniards have a force but little less than thirty thousand.”

“How then will it be possible to besiege the city, if, in addition to the reinforcements, the king’s army numbers no more than eight thousand men?” Robert asked in dismay.

“That is more than I can tell you, lad, although judging from the appearance of affairs, I should say there was little inclination on the part of the commanders to abandon the enterprise. I am told that the fortifications round about the city are very strong—that the Spaniards are defendin’ them with great bravery, yet it is the climate an’ the lack of water which is killin’ the king’s men. It’s not my purpose to alarm you, lads, but what *I* have seen, so you will see once outside this tent, therefore I’m tellin’ no more than must come under your own notice. Lack of water causes more deaths than Spanish bullets. Never a day passes but that ten, fifteen, mayhap two score of men drop dead in the trenches from heat, or thirst, or fatigue.”

“How long has the siege been carried on?” Darius asked.

“On the seventeenth of June the main body of the expedition was landed, and the work begun.”

“And the royal troops are no nearer capturing

the city than when it was first invested?" Robert asked.

"Well, lad, that is as may be. The parallels have been run, an' earthworks thrown up by the king's men, all of which has occupied much time; but from what I can learn it would seem as if only in so far have they succeeded with the work."

"And what is likely to be the end of it?" Robert asked, half to himself. "Will this army remain here until sickness has vanquished it?"

"There is a rumor in the air, an' I'm inclined to give it due credit, that Admiral Pocock will shortly make an attack. If such be the case we are come in good time, lads, for he who does no more than sit down in front of a beleaguered city has dull work of it, an' we have been spared a deal of that monotonous task. It may be that the naval force will succeed in reducing the city, an' we shall be in at the death."

Sergeant Prout spoke in what he intended should be a jovial, hopeful tone; but both Robert and Darius believed they detected much of anxiety beneath the light words.

"What of Colonel Putnam's men?" Robert asked at last. "Has our coming been of no avail to them?"

"Ay, lad, through us they will speedily be taken away from their enforced encampment, an' none too

soon, I'm thinkin'," unless it pleases them to be on short allowance. Two transports, under convoy of a sloop-of-war, have already set out to bring them in, and if the wind be favorable we should be able to make a report to Colonel Putnam before three days have passed."

Without really intending to do so, Robert glanced toward Nicholas Vallet, and that which he saw in the lad's countenance caused him sincere sorrow, for again was this young recruit giving way to his fears in most cowardly fashion. The boy's face was almost livid in its paleness; his hands trembled violently, and the corners of his mouth twitched as if only by the greatest exertion of will could he prevent himself from screaming aloud.

At one time during the mutiny; in the forest when the black men had made their savage assault; on the march while death stared them full in the face, Nicholas Vallet had been a hero. When first told of the dangers of the Cuban climate; in the hold of the Golden Pippin after the most imminent of the danger had passed; on the deck of the wreck when the chances that all would be saved were good, and now, safe in camp doing no more than listening to the tales of suffering and death, this lad was showing himself to be the veriest poltroon that could be found in the North American provinces.

His was a character which Robert failed utterly to understand, and he gazed at him as if in deep study, until the fixedness of his look attracted Sergeant Prout's attention.

"It may be," the old soldier said, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "I had no right to alarm you thus, lads, an' yet there was in my mind the idea that it were better you should be prepared for what will meet your gaze once you're outside this tent. It seems to me a man can better encounter danger if he knows how great it is, than if he suddenly comes upon it while unprepared. To my mind the situation is no more than serious, yet here are we four, thus far in good health, and one of us well-nigh dumb with terror before he has seen a tithe of the misery regardin' which I spoke."

"Now you are meaning me, Sergeant Prout," Nicholas said in a tremulous voice.

"Ay, lad, so I am, an' it has come to my mind that perhaps it would be well, when these cowardly attacks come upon you, that we four discuss the matter plainly in the hope you may the sooner recover. When you saved my life on the night before the last, you played the part of a brave man, for many there be who would have hesitated at rushin' in front of a black fool's knife. Therefore do I know, Nicholas Vallet, that there are times when your

courage is to be admired. How comes it then that you can at other moments, when the danger is less, show yourself so thoroughly a coward?"

"I know not," Nicholas replied sadly, furtively brushing a tear-drop from his eye. "I never willingly went into great danger before, and therefore did not know myself. Can you not understand that it shames me?"

"Such bein' the case, lad, how is it you are not able to get a firm hold of yourself?"

"That is what I do not know, Sergeant Prout," and bowing his head on his arm, the recruit from New Rochelle gave way to an unmanly burst of tears.

CHAPTER XI.

IN CAMP.

THE fact that Sergeant Prout had thought it necessary to speak with his comrades concerning the condition of affairs among the besiegers, caused Robert great anxiety.

The information which he brought was, as a matter of course, most disheartening, yet such news was not so disquieting to the lad as the knowledge that the old soldier was not only willing, but eager, to discuss the situation with them.

In New Rochelle Robert had often heard it said that "the sergeant was one above all others who would not speak of any military movement while it was in progress, lest by so doing he should seem to question the skill of his superiors," and this remark, repeated as it had been in a variety of forms, came into the lad's mind now as distinctly as if the words were yet being spoken in his ear.

Therefore it was, while Darius inquired concerning this or that probable move, and speculated as to

whether the siege might be continued now so many were on the sick list, he believed the old soldier had not yet spoken of half the disasters which threatened. At that moment it seemed to Robert as if there was nothing for them save to swell the list of the sick and the dying, and already had he said to himself that it was impossible the city could be taken.

Perhaps Sergeant Prout guessed somewhat of the thoughts in the lad's mind, for after a brief pause he exclaimed emphatically:—

“I'm an old fool, that's what's the matter with me! Fearin' lest you boys should be thoroughly disheartened by the scenes in camp, I took it upon myself to prepare you for such sights as I had witnessed. Instead of workin' any good, I've only given you to understand that matters are ten times worse than really is the case. The only remedy is for you to come outside with me. We'll make a tour of the encampment, an' then I allow you'll agree I painted it altogether too black.”

Robert welcomed this proposition, for it seemed impossible he could control his feelings if they remained in the tent much longer, and the words had hardly more than been spoken before he was on his feet ready to set out.

Nicholas apparently had no desire to make one of the party. His fear yet held the mastery over him,

and he glanced from side to side nervously, as if fearing immediate bodily injury.

Robert held out his hand, but the frightened lad pretended not to see it, until the former said peremptorily : —

“Come with me, Nicholas. We are not minded to separate now after having come safely through so many dangers.”

Even then the lad would not have obeyed, but that both the sergeant and Darius lingered until he should join them, and all might see that it was only by a great effort he could nerve himself for the task.

“I’m beginnin’ to get an insight into your behavior,” the old soldier said in a kindly tone. “If an enemy stood facin’ us, an’ quick action was necessary, you’d be the first in the fray. It seems to be the dangers of the future which give you the most trouble.”

“I wish I might believe what you say ; but no one can tell, surely not I, what I am likely to do.”

Between them the sergeant and Robert led Nicholas out of the tent, and once in the open air the boys drew a long breath of relief. They had been prepared to look upon horrible sights, and yet nothing more than might have been anticipated met their gaze.

They were near the seashore, at least two miles

from the beleaguered city, and before them was spread only such a panorama as one would expect to see. Here and there, stretching out like long threads, were parallels, with traverses laid at the necessary points, and everywhere was such a display of activity as was natural under the circumstances.

It was a picture of war in its mildest guise, and even Robert wondered why the old soldier had apparently lost heart when everything appeared to be in proper condition.

First along this trench and then that, they walked, many times exposed to the enemy's fire without being aware of the fact, and in no place was any terrible spectacle presented.

Once they saw a man sink down with his hand pressed to his chest, while between his fingers ran a stream of crimson fluid, and they knew as a matter of course that he was wounded; but he bore his suffering quietly, thus robbing the scene of its worst horrors.

In another trench they saw a man fall headlong to the ground without apparent cause, and when his comrades raised him his face was blackened and distorted; but the sergeant said quickly, as if afraid they might ask questions from those near, that it was a case of sunstroke, and this seemed a plausible explanation.

Then Darius would have gone to a certain portion

of the lines toward which many soldiers were wending their way ; but Sergeant Prout checked him by saying there was nothing of interest to be seen in that section. In fact, he seemed so eager to prevent them from straying in such direction that Robert took advantage of a convenient opportunity to ask a soldier who was passing, what was being done over there.

“Nothin’ of much account save dyin’,” the man replied with a laugh, which was to Robert more horrible than anything he had ever heard. “The hospital camps are thereabouts, an’ if you want to see how fast men can give up the ghost in sich a fever-stricken place as this, take a trip over that way. It’ll give you Provincials an idea of what you’re comin’ to when the climate knocks you out.”

Although ignorant of the art of warfare, the boys could see that the works which had been thrown up by the besiegers were not fully manned, and they understood that the shower of shot and grape which was being fired into the doomed forts, was by no means as heavy as it should have been from a force as large as that sent by the King of England.

Sergeant Prout did his best to prevent them from speaking with any of the soldiers, although he was not always successful, as was shown by Robert’s brief conversation, and it was observed by his com-

rades that he took good care to direct their steps towards the coast, rather than cityward.

“Why do we keep so far away?” Darius asked with a show of impatience. “I had rather watch those who are at work with the heavy guns.”

“That’s because you’re a raw recruit,” the sergeant said with a laugh. “Wait till you’ve seen service, an’ then you’ll be willin’ to keep out of range. We shall be ordered in there soon enough, an’ there is no reason why we should poke our noses into a shower of bullets before havin’ good reason.”

To prevent them from going where too much might be seen of the distress caused by the climate and lack of water, the old soldier called their attention to a large force of negroes who were throwing up earthworks, and explained that these laborers who were but little inconvenienced by the fervid rays of the sun, had been brought from Jamaica, which province leased the services of fifteen hundred slaves, at the rate of fivepence a day each.

“Niggers are really worth three times as much,” the sergeant said, apparently becoming more deeply interested in his subject as four soldiers approached bearing a comrade on a litter. “The government of Jamaica is jest the same as givin’ King George tenpence a day on each one, an’ takin’ the chances that half the crowd will be killed. Come over this

way," he added quickly, as more soldiers with litters appeared. "There in the offin' is the English fleet under Admiral Sir George Pocock. Twenty-three ships of the line, twenty-four frigates, bomb-ketches, fire-ships, tenders, an' sich like. Ninety-three transports which brought troops, sixteen ships laden with artillery, eight hospital ships, twenty-four loaded with provisions, four with fascines, two that brought negroes, three laden with horses, an' six to bear the baggage of the officers. Two hundred an' three vessels of different kinds, all fitted out for the purpose of capturin' this 'ere city."

It was a brave sight, and the boys gazed long at the enormous fleet, some close in shore, others cruising outside but within sight of the harbor entrance, and the remainder lying hove-to at convenient distance from the coast.

Then even this spectacle wearied the eye, and quite by accident Sergeant Prout led the lads near to where the troops from North America were encamped.

Immediately the four were recognized the men shouted for them to come nearer, and tell the story of the disaster to the Golden Pippin.

It was much like seeing old friends from home, to meet these soldiers from the Provinces of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, and the lads clasped

hands with every one who offered the courtesy, feeling wonderfully revived by being with "one's own people" once more.

Now it was no longer possible for Sergeant Prout to keep from his young comrades the true state of affairs. The men, who had been on the island long enough to know all which the king's troops must battle against, made no attempt to brighten the picture when they said, without fear of being contradicted, that if the besiegers remained there long enough not one would be left alive to tell the tale, so rapidly was the sun and the fever carrying off these strangers to the deadly climate.

"While we were coming ashore I saw six men fall stricken with the black death," a soldier from New York said to Robert, with the air of one who tells an entertaining tale, "and since then they have tumbled over all around me. The only wonder is that the entire army and navy are not on the sick-list, instead of only one half the number."

"An' bein' on the sick-list in this bloomin' island is much the same as bein' counted with the dead," another soldier added. "I'm told by a corporal in the Duke of Richmond's troop, that not one in ten of them who are taken ever walk out of the hospital tents again."

"Anythin' is better than sittin' 'round here waitin'

for the fever," a recruit from New Jersey said with a nervous laugh. "Why isn't an attack made on the fortifications?"

"That'll come soon enough," some one replied. "I hear that the plans are bein' laid this blessed minute, an' within the next eight an' forty hours you can count on havin' a chance to swap bullets with the Spaniards."

This remark led the conversation into a new channel, and soon all in the vicinity were repeating this camp rumor, explaining certain movements of the troops, and relating scraps of orders yet to be given which had been overheard, each item tending to prove that an assault would be made upon the enemy's works within a very short time.

"Of course that's what's bound to come mighty soon," an old soldier said emphatically, addressing himself to the sergeant. "It's a case of losin' both the army an' navy if the forces loiter 'round here many weeks longer, an' how can matters be made any worse by Lord Albemarle's shovin' us in as food for Spanish powder?"

"And once we make the attack we'll take the city," a young recruit cried enthusiastically, whereat the old soldier shook his head as if sympathizing with the other because of his ignorance.

"Don't be so sure of that, my fine lad. So far the

Spaniards have shown themselves to be good fighters, an' you may make certain it won't be a one-sided battle."

Then some one ventured to suggest that Israel Putnam's force would be left out in the cold when the first assault was made, and at this remark Sergeant Prout fired up.

"Don't think the officer from Connecticut will loiter the time away when there's prospect of a fight ahead of him. I don't know who may be in command of the transports; but this I'll answer for, that the crews will do some livelier jumpin' than they ever did before, once the colonel sets about makin' ready. It won't take Israel Putnam many hours to embark his men, even though he's forced to swim them out to the vessels, an' you may count on seein' him mighty soon after the wind serves."

This emphatic remark, and the sergeant spoke as if he was personally aggrieved because any one had dared suggest that the leader of the Connecticut troops would not be on the ground whenever there was a prospect for hard work, served to check the others from venturing any opinion on the subject, and soon the men were busily engaged figuring up the probable number of dead bodies which had been taken out of the camp hospitals each day since the British army invested the city.

This was a gruesome subject even to Robert and Darius, and Nicholas turned and twisted about on the log which served as a seat, until it seemed certain he would run away from the sound of the croaking voices, despite all his good resolutions.

Sergeant Prout was quick to observe that this was anything rather than a pleasing subject to all of his especial comrades, and he proposed that they return to their tent, for as yet neither member of the little party had broken his fast.

The day was nearly spent when they were finally in their quarters again, and after the sergeant had drawn rations for his squad, he "dressed them up into shape," as he expressed it, by giving to each some duty to perform.

"I can't say how long we'll be allowed a whole tent to ourselves," he said by way of preface; "but so long as we are thus fortunate, we'll try to keep things ship-shape. With so many in the hospital——"

He ceased speaking very suddenly as he realized that he was touching on a subject which had best be kept in the background as far as possible, especially when each of them could not fail to understand that but for the sick, the dying or the dead, such commodious quarters would not have been assigned them.

"We'll do our full duty the same as if we expected

to hold this 'ere canvas shanty so long as we stay on the island," he said, making another start with his preface. "From all I've seen I should say Robert would make the best cook, an' if he ain't quite up to the mark I'll give him a lift now an' then. Nicholas shall look to the fuel supply; Darius will fetch the water, an' I'll keep things straight generally. Now then, cookee, get to work, an' the assistants may as well break in on their duties now as any other time."

"Do you know where I can find water?" Darius asked, and after some reflection the old soldier replied:—

"I reckon that's goin' to be the nicest job of all, for much depends on what we drink, so far as our health is concerned. It had best be set down as a rule that we'll go thirsty rather than put up with foul water, an' even then we'll use tea, if it so be we can buy the herb. I'll have a look around an' find out jest where the best supply can be had."

With this remark the sergeant left the tent, and Darius, eager to be doing some portion of the work, proposed that he and Nicholas gather a quantity of wood in case of an emergency.

Robert had no reason for protesting against such labor, more particularly since he knew it must be done before the meal could be cooked, and the two

set out, leaving him alone in the tent to speculate as to how many who had occupied this shelter since it was first set up here, were yet alive.

He was fully engaged with such gloomy thoughts when a man stole, rather than walked, into the tent, and stood gazing around as if uncertain whether it was safe for him to remain.

Looking up in surprise, Robert saw before him the master of the Golden Pippin, a most dejected looking individual as could have been found outside the hospitals.

“Ain’t you—You look—Say, lad, were you wrecked on the—on my ship?”

“Yes, sir,” Robert replied hesitatingly, for he was not pleased at being forced to admit an acquaintance, however slight, with such a man.

“Have you got anything to eat? I’m a good deal more’n half starved, an’ it don’t seem as if I could keep on my feet many minutes longer. Give me a bite of somethin’, lad, for, save water, nothin’ has passed my lips since I came ashore.”

“We have only our rations here, and what is given to you must be taken from some of us. Why don’t you apply to the officers whose duty it is to deal out the provisions?”

“I don’t dare to, lad. There’s bound to be some kind of an inquiry regardin’ the wreck of the Golden

Pippin, an' Colonel Putnam has threatened to make me suffer for my slip."

"Slip? Do you call——"

"You shall call it whatever you will, lad, so you satisfy my hunger now. I'm willin' to admit that I the same as committed a crime by gettin' at the liquor while there were so many on board; but— There's no good in my tryin' to give you reasons for it, an' besides, I'm so near dead from lack of food that I haven't the strength to talk much."

"Colonel Putnam isn't here yet, and surely you can get into no trouble until he comes. Go to the quartermasters."

"I don't dare to. I did count on findin' among the masters of the transports some one who would lend me a hand; but I can't get past the guard to the shore. I'm well-nigh desperate, boy, an' if you won't share with me I'll have to help myself."

A certain amount of rations were lying on the ground near one corner of the tent, and the hungry shipmaster had stepped toward the food as if to carry out his threat, when a voice from the outside cried warningly:—

"Have a care what you do! We are not here to feed drunken sailors who are willin' to imperil the lives of five hundred men for the sake of indulgin' in strong drink!"

It was Sergeant Prout who had spoken, and as the intruder turned suddenly he found himself face to face with the old soldier.

“I’m starvin’,” the master of the transport whined.

“How did you get here?”

“Made my way through the Spanish lines, the same as you did, I reckon. The first mate started with me; but he was killed on the way, an’ I came mighty near sharin’ his fate. Give me a bite to eat, sergeant, an’ then I’ll take my chances on the shore once more.”

“If the lad is willin’ I won’t say you nay, though it don’t strike me as bein’ jest the fair thing for us four to feed such as you.”

The man waited for no further permission; but made a ravenous attack upon the food, and while he was thus engaged Darius and Nicholas returned.

He gave no heed to them; but continued to literally stuff food into his mouth until that which should have served as a full meal for the four comrades had been devoured.

“We’ve fed you, an’ are likely to go hungry ourselves, unless it be possible to beg a fresh supply,” Sergeant Prout said sharply when the visitor looked hungrily around as if in hope of seeing something more in the way of food. “Take my advice an’ put

as long a distance as possible betwixt yourself an' Colonel Putnam. If I stood in your shoes I'd go to sea in any kind of a craft, rather than be on this island when he comes up."

"I allow he'll be hard on me," the man whined.

"Hard? Well, Captain Tyler—I believe that's your name—I don't know what the penalty is for gettin' drunk under such circumstances as you were in; but this I'll go bail: Israel Putnam will push you jest as far as he can, an' from what I've seen of him, I'm thinkin' that'll be a long ways."

"I had some little hopes that the fightin' would be so hot here he wouldn't have time to think of me again."

"Unless he's killed, you can count on his rememberin' everything that happened aboard the Golden Pippin, an' on payin' off his score in full."

"I'll try once more to board one of the transports," the man said in a voice which was far from steady. "Don't go out of your way to tell him I've been here; it would do you no good to kick me when I'm down about as far as a man well can be."

"I'll hold my tongue unless he questions me, an' you'd best put as many miles of salt water betwixt this island an' yourself as you can, before them as went ashore from the Golden Pippin get here."

Captain Tyler went out of the tent into the dark-

ness, moving with hesitating steps as if afraid every man's hand was already against him, and when he had disappeared Robert said in a whisper :—

“Of course you made out the situation to be worse than it really is, sergeant. That man deserves a thorough frightening, for, so far as he was concerned, we might all have been drowned.”

“I didn't put it one whit harder than I believe is the truth,” the old soldier said solemnly. “He can count on bein' brought up before a court martial within half an hour after the colonel claps eyes on him.”

“It don't seem likely anything can be done to the man for getting drunk on board his own vessel,” Darius suggested, and the sergeant replied :—

“He was in the king's service, the same as if he had regularly enlisted, an' you'll find that the punishment won't be light.”

“You seem to feel positive Colonel Putnam will remember all that happened, even after he sees the condition of affair here?”

“Positive? Why, lad, I know what'll come as well as if it was all happenin' this very minute. Don't you make any mistake but that those mutineers will be made to answer for what went on just before the ship struck, an' it'll be one of the first duties the colonel attends to after he arrives.”

At this moment Robert glanced quite by accident in the direction of Nicholas Vallet, who was cowering under the edge of the tent as if bent on crawling beneath the canvas. The lad's face was pallid, as it had been that night in the hold of the Golden Pippin after she struck the reef, and his lips twitched and quivered until it was as if he was making grimaces.

"What is the matter, Nicholas?" he asked in alarm.

"Nothing that you can help me in."

"But what has happened, lad? What has alarmed you so suddenly?"

Both the sergeant and Darius went toward the frightened boy, as if believing it might be possible for them to give him relief, but he waved them off as he cried with a moan:—

"You've had trouble enough with me already, and it's time you let me go to destruction without trying to help me!"

"Tell us what has come over you, lad?" the sergeant cried sharply.

"It's nothing new, Sergeant Prout. I'd almost forgotten that I must meet Colonel Putnam again. Now I'll go after Captain Tyler—perhaps he'll find a chance to leave the island. Anything is better than being hanged for turning mutineer!"

“It isn’t so serious as that, Nicholas!” Robert cried. “You didn’t join the mutiny; but played a brave part when we were on guard in the hold, until——”

“Until I went all to pieces like the meanest coward in the world!” the unhappy boy wailed. “I don’t believe I could even stand still in the smallest kind of a battle, and I know I’d die with fright if I was to be tried before a court-martial.”

“Look you, lad,” and the sergeant spoke sternly. “Eight an’ forty hours ago I wouldn’t have lifted my hand to save you from doin’ any wild or foolish thing; but now there’s a difference in my feelin’s, an’ I’m not disposed to let you go your own gait when it’s a wrong one. I don’t want to soften things one whit, therefore I’ll say you’ll most likely get punishment of some sort for disobeyin’ orders; but it won’t be so severe that you can’t stand up under it, an’ be more of a man after it’s over. Now if there’s any danger of your givin’ us the slip this night, I’ll take the responsibility of makin’ you a close prisoner, for I’m determined you shan’t do any crazy thing that comes into your head.”

It is doubtful if Nicholas understood very much of what the sergeant said; but Robert, flinging himself down on the ground by the side of the unhappy boy, whispered soothing words into his ear until he

was partially calmed, and, finally, induced to take his place with the others.

“ We’ll have supper now, if the sergeant can get any more rations, and by the time that has been eaten perhaps we’ll see a way out of your troubles.”

To these friendly words Nicholas replied only by seizing Robert’s hand in his as he whispered :—

“ You’re the bravest and best lad I ever knew ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

THE ASSAULT.

Not until he had exacted a promise from Nicholas that he would make no attempt at giving his comrades the slip, did Sergeant Prout leave the tent to go after a fresh supply of provisions.

Then he set out with the air of one who is thoroughly conversant with the locality, and while he was absent Robert and Darius did their best to cheer Nicholas, by assuring him that after the service he had rendered it was not reasonable to believe Colonel Putnam would fix upon any severe punishment in case he should believe it necessary to bring up the matter again.

Half an hour elapsed before the sergeant returned, and then words of his were not needed for the lads to understand that something unusual had occurred.

“What is it, sergeant?” Robert cried breathlessly, giving no heed to the food which the old soldier threw down in front of him.

“There is a movement of some kind to be made this night, lads, an’ the Provincial troops are in it.”

“Think you they will make an assault before Colonel Putnam comes?” Robert asked in surprise, as if believing that the officer from Connecticut was of so much importance that no serious maneuver could well be made without him.

“From all I can gather, an’ after what we heard this afternoon, I’m inclined to believe the assault will be made. We’ll need these rations; but don’t spend any too much time gettin’ them ready, for it would be hard fortune indeed if we missed the first action.”

It was only natural that the lads, not even excepting Nicholas, should be highly excited by the news brought. Raw recruits as they were, there was to them nothing in the announcement to provoke apprehension. They knew full well, else had they been simples, that an assault on the enemy’s fortifications involved fighting; but to their minds a long distance separated the two armies, as was the case during the day, and they failed to realize that many brave fellows must be shot down before either side could claim a victory.

All were so excited as to no longer have any desire for food. If Sergeant Prout had not sternly commanded that their first attention be given to “linin’ their ribs with a generous supply of provisions,” the three would have rushed out of the tent without

delay, lest by lingering they might lose any portion of the possible display.

Perhaps had it not been for Nicholas, the old soldier would have cautioned the lads regarding what might be expected, lest they should be foolishly bold; but his experience of the afternoon, while trying to prepare them for the disagreeable scenes of the camp, had been such that he decided to hold his peace. Therefore, it was that these three recruits from New Rochelle made ready for the assault, during which so much blood was to be spilled, as if they were bent on an excursion of pleasure wherein no danger lurked.

Just before the meal was made ready Sergeant Prout lounged carelessly out of the tent, after having privately signified to Robert by a gesture that he was to follow later, and as soon as the lad could slip away from his comrades without exciting suspicion as to his purpose, he joined the old soldier twenty paces in the rear of their quarters.

“I didn’t dare say before Nicholas much about what may be expected this night, lest his cowardice be excited; but it is in the highest degree important that you an’ I keep an eye on him, if it so be there’s an assault.”

“To what end?” Robert asked.

“Lest he show the white feather where such an

exhibition would be worse than death. Should he have one of his cowardly fits before we have started, no great harm will be done, because he can quietly be left behind and the remainder of the troops be none the wiser. But once we are in formation an' settin' forward, it were better to kill the lad then an' there than allow him to run away."

"But surely, Sergeant Prout, you are not counting on my doing anything of that kind to a comrade?"

"No, I reckon you'd hardly have the nerve for it; but this much I hold you to: From the moment we leave the tent he must march between you an' me, an' I count on your grapplin' with him if there be no other way of keepin' the lad to his place in the line. Unless the fortunes of war go against me, I shall also have him under my thumb, an' we'll see who can frighten him the worst—the enemy or I. Now go back to the tent, an' do not question me regardin' the possible movements this night lest we arouse him to one of his displays of poltroonery."

Though the excitement had taken the edge from their appetites, the three lads ate a reasonably hearty supper on this night before the assault, and the meal had hardly come to an end when the roar of cannon seemed to cause a tremor of the earth.

In an instant the four comrades were out of the

tent, the first thought of each being that the assault had begun and they were left behind.

The scene, if one could forget that the chief motive of the picture was the taking of human life, was wonderfully grand.

The inner harbor, where lay the Spanish fleet numbering fifteen vessels mounting no less than seven hundred and sixty guns, appeared within an instant after the boys came into the open air, to be one mass of flame, while seaward, from every port of Morro Castle, came tongues of fire and wreaths of smoke. Along the fortifications directly in front of the city now and then could be heard, when the roar of heavy guns slackened momentarily, the sharp crackle of musketry, and it was as if thousands of gigantic fire-flies were hovering over the breastworks and trenches.

“Has the attack been made?” Robert asked breathlessly.

“No, lad. Here be our forces not yet in line, an’ it looks much as though the enemy was treatin’ us to a show of what they can do in the way of burnin’ powder,” Sergeant Prout replied as he gazed here and there hurriedly, turning from point to point in the faint hope of being able to understand the nature of this demonstration.

The British fleet, lying to off the coast just

beyond range of the enemy's heaviest guns, made no reply to this outburst. The dark forms of the ships could be seen rising and falling on the swell of the ocean; save for their night lanterns, they showed black as ink against the lighter sky.

"It must be that the Spaniards have got an inklin' of the intended assault," Sergeant Prout said half to himself, "else this wild firin' cannot be explained."

"Then if our commander's intentions are known, the British forces will not move up to-night?" Robert suggested, and he had hardly spoken when from every portion of the encampment could be heard the rolling of drums summoning the soldiers into line, and Sergeant Prout, seizing Nicholas by the hand as if he would aid him to run the faster, cried excitedly:—

"Come on, lads, an' put your best foot forward now! The troops are formin', an' we must be with the men from our province!"

Remembering the caution given him, Robert ranged himself on the opposite side of the boy whose courage was so erratic, and at full speed the four ran in the direction where, thanks to their excursion of the afternoon, they knew the troops from North America were stationed.

The enemy's fire seemed to increase rather than

slacken as the moments passed on, and by the time the four comrades gained the desired point the detonations were so loud and continuous that it was well-nigh impossible to hear what one's nearest neighbor said, even when he spoke at the full strength of his lungs.

Among the recruits from New York province, both officers and men, many were acquainted with Sergeant Prout, and immediately he appeared with his following a score or more beckoned him to join them.

There was little choice of position, and this squad from New Rochelle took their stations in the line nearest at hand, regardless of who might be in command.

None were in this immediate vicinity save the troops so lately come from North America, therefore little information could be gained by the sergeant and his comrades relative to the probable point of attack.

"There's one thing certain," the old soldier said to his young comrades after trying in vain to ascertain some particulars regarding the enemy's works. "These 'ere parallels will come pretty nigh showin' the direction in which we are to be sent, an' unless I'm off my reckonin' we'll strike the Spaniards thereabouts," and he pointed toward that portion of

the fortifications where it appeared as if the flashing of the guns was the most frequent. "You can tell by their blazin' away at such a rate that somethin' was learned of our proposed assault, an' it is safe to say the weakest part of the line puts on the greatest show of strength."

Even Nicholas could converse calmly regarding the proposed maneuver, for as yet there was nothing horrifying in such scenes of war as they were witnessing. Being beyond range, the shot did not do any execution, and the wounded among the English soldiers in the trenches could not be brought to the rear while such a heavy fire was maintained.

Therefore, as has been said, the lads saw only the spectacular feature of the battle, without any of that bloody, horrible detail of wounds.

It was more like some festival arranged on the king's birthday, than a scene wherein men were to strive for each other's lives.

The recruits had been drawn up in line perhaps ten minutes, and some were beginning to ask impatiently why they were thus kept idly waiting while the enemy was showing such signs of activity, when the roaring of cannon burst forth in another direction, and, looking seaward, the lads saw that vast line of war-vessels lighted up as if by magic with innumerable flashes, until all the craft stood revealed

to view as they swept slowly on under the influence of a gentle night breeze within range of Morro and Punta Castles, firing as they advanced.

It was as if the very earth shook beneath the concussion of these mighty engines of war, and the air vibrated until one would fain hold his hands against his ears to shield the delicate organs from those billows of sound which beat against them painfully.

So intent were the boys in gazing on the terrible picture made by the English fleet as it thus came into night action, that they gave no heed to anything else around them, and would hardly have been conscious that the word was passed for the column to advance, had not the sergeant pushed them into line.

As he turned, Robert noted the expressive look in the old soldier's eye as he glanced toward Nicholas, and understood that Sergeant Prout was warning him to have a care over the lad whom they proposed to defend against himself.

Shoulder to shoulder these four marched steadily forward into that screaming, hissing hail of iron and lead, every nerve strained to its utmost tension, the blood bounding in their veins until it seemed suddenly to have been heated to boiling point, apparently unconscious that death was facing them, until from the rank directly in advance, hardly more than

three paces in front of Nicholas, a soldier leaped upward with a scream that could be heard even above the thunderous roar of the guns, and fell forward on his face, a lifeless mass.

For an instant a deathly faintness seized Robert Clement, and while one might have counted five he hesitated, trying to gain control of his nerves, repeating to himself that such scenes as this had been witnessed again and again by his father without show of fear, and if he would not bring reproach upon that name of which he was so proud, he must stifle all evidences of weakness.

In that brief interval of time his thoughts went back to the home at New Rochelle; he saw his mother; he read in her face the desire that he should prove himself a true soldier, and then the first shock had passed away.

He glanced toward Nicholas, and to his surprise that timorous lad was betraying no evidence of agitation save, as might be seen by the glow of burning powder, a vivid red spot had appeared on each cheek, and his breath was coming thick and fast. Instead of drawing back as Robert had expected would be the case, he whom Sergeant Prout had called "a cowardly coward," was pressing forward close upon the heels of the foremost rank.

Then it seemed to Robert as if some one cheered.



“ Robert saw in front, and on either side of him, men discharging their muskets.”

He may have fancied it; but there was in his mind the idea that all his companions were shouting, and, hardly conscious of what he did, he added his voice to this imaginary clamor.

He saw Sergeant Prout slap Nicholas on the back encouragingly, and understood that Darius was screaming some words into his ear; but what they were he would not have known even though the cannonading had suddenly ceased.

The flashes of light in front of him appeared to be approaching; he was not sensible of the fact that it was himself who was advancing toward them. He saw in front, and on either side of him, men aiming their muskets and discharging them. He did the same. A soldier immediately in the rear lurched forward, striking him with such force as almost knocked him down; he understood dimly that a man was dying—perhaps dead; but he heeded it not.

At that instant the men around him broke into a run, and he followed their example, dimly realizing that Nicholas was on one side and Darius on the other, and then it seemed as if he was enveloped in flame. The odor of burning powder assailed his nostrils. He saw here and there crimson blotches which glowed in the fitful light; at times he heard cries of pain, and groans; but it was all one medley

of horror, during which he was struggling for life itself, all unwitting that he also was attempting to take life.

There was a time when he was literally unconscious and then reason came in flashes, as it were. He had a dim idea that, with his comrades, he was close against the walls of the fortification; that they trampled over the dead and dying. Then it was as if a great wave swept them back without military formation, helter-skelter, as are swept men in a panic of fear, and when he understood clearly his own movements, he stood in the midst of a throng of soldiers near-by the point from which he had started.

Nicholas and Darius were on either side of him; the sergeant, bare-headed and with a long red streak across his cheek, was but a few paces away, and on every hand men were binding up their own or their comrades' wounds as best they might, while over all were those ominous blotches of crimson, which gave forth a peculiar salty odor that was apparent even above the pungent smoke of the powder.

"Has the assault been abandoned?" Nicholas asked, and because there was at that instant a lull in the cannonading, the sergeant heard the question.

"Abandoned, lad?" the old soldier cried. "Would you have me believe that you don't know what has been goin' on this last half hour?"

“ It seemed as if we went forward, and then came back.”

“ Ay, so we did, an’ I am proud of you three lads for goin’ into that witherin’ fire as you did. Abandoned the assault? It has been made, lad, an’ right gallantly, although we were beaten back. More English blood has been spilled since we left this place than would serve to dye the uniforms of all the Spaniards yonder to the color of British coats. Nicholas, I was not mistaken in you ; you are a coward only when danger is afar off.”

The booming of the guns increased from harbor and from sea, from breastworks and from trenches, and the conversation perforce ceased during five minutes or more, when the rapid fire slackened.

In another five minutes nothing save the heavy clouds of smoke which hung over plain and town, the writhing of motionless figures which lay between the castle walls and the English lines, betokened that furious whirlwind of death which had so lately raged.

Men were told off here and there to go in search of the wounded : others were detailed for work in the trenches, in order that those who had been there so many hours might be relieved, and yet others were dismissed from duty until the next summons to arms should be sounded.

Among these last were Sergeant Prout and his comrades, and the old man said to the lads as he motioned for them to march on in advance :—

“We’ll go back to our quarters. A good soldier never loses an opportunity to gain sleep, and since no one can say how often or how long we may be called upon for duty to-morrow, it stands us in hand to put our bodies into the best possible shape for whatever be required.”

Not until the four were alone together in their tent was any comment made upon the events of the evening, and then Darius, speaking slowly and in a tremulous voice as if fear had just begun to take possession of him, said :—

“I cannot make it seem real that I marched with the others up to the fortifications while the enemy was pouring such a fire upon us, nor do I remember anything which happened, except when the first man fell after having been wounded.”

“It is to me as if I had done no more than stand in line while the fire continued,” Nicholas added. “Certainly I never should have dared to advance a single pace had I known that I was to come within range of the shot.”

“And yet all three of you lads behaved gallantly,” the sergeant said in a tone of satisfaction. “You have shown yourselves to be brave, and yet confess that

you knew nothing about it. Let me tell you that many a hero's reputation is made in battle when he knows as little regardin' the circumstances as you did about this night's doin's. It is to me always as if the fumes of the powder set me off into a trance, although I have heard it explained in a different way. Some claim the excitement becomes so great that a man's brain is in such a whirl he realizes little or nothin'. I say he is drunken on the smell of burning powder, and at such times is not responsible for what he does ; but you'll find he gets credit for doin' the right thing, an' blamed if he makes a mistake. It's because of that same thing, I reckon, that troops are marched shoulder to shoulder when a charge is made. Like enough the mere pressure of a comrade's elbow is enough to keep you in line when otherwise you might drop out without intendin' to do so, and go to the rear, thus earnin' for yourself the name of coward. I don't fall down an' worship those who are said to be heroes in battle, and for the reason that I believe there's no man so made that he can stand up an' shoot his fellow-man, with good chances of bein' butchered himself an' not cringe now and then a good bit. If it doesn't affect him no ways disagreeable, then I'll say he's a brute as hasn't got any feelin's."

Robert made no reply to this remark. Perhaps he was trying to understand himself under the light of such reasoning as was advanced by the sergeant, and Darius, whose thoughts went forth to the morrow, said with a certain tremor of the voice which was perceptible to all:—

“I believe he who has never seen a battle can go in for the first time more boldly than another who knows what may be expected. It is positive that if we were ordered out for another assault this night, I should be so thoroughly afraid that I could not hold myself in line.”

“You *would* hold yourself there, lad, and for the good reason that in your mind would be the thought of what your companions-in-arms might say if you showed the white feather; but this is not the proper kind of talk at so late an hour in the night. Sleep is what we’re after, an’ since we’re like to get all the experience that raw recruits need—a good deal more than they want—I give strict orders that no person in this tent opens his mouth again until after the sun has risen to-morrow mornin’.”

CHAPTER XIII.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL PUTNAM.

ON the morning after the assault the three lads, who frequently spoke of themselves as "Sergeant Prout's recruits," were astir as soon as the sun came up out of the sea, each eager to learn the details of the action in which they had taken part, but knew so little.

Because of the praise bestowed upon them by the old soldier they may have come to think it a gallant affair, in which everything was to be admired; but if they had any such idea it was quickly and rudely dispelled when they stepped out of the tent.

It so chanced that the wounded were being brought directly past the lads' quarters at the very hour they arose, for the purpose of establishing a new hospital on the seacoast, because the black fever had made its appearance in the tents given over to the use of the disabled.

There was nothing of glory in the long lines of maimed and mangled men who marched wearily

past the tent, displaying wounds which should have received the surgeon's care many hours previous, and Sergeant Prout's recruits saw nothing to admire as the helpless ones were carried past in cots formed by fastening a blanket on two poles. It was the cruel side of war upon which they were gazing; all the coloring and tinsel had been shown the night previous, when the noise of the cannon drowned the moans of the dying, or the groans of the grievously wounded.

Nicholas turned pale and hid his face in his hands long before the pitiful procession had dragged its mangled length past the tent, while both Robert and Darius turned away sick at heart after gazing at the poor fellows less than five minutes.

During nearly an hour the lads were held prisoners, as it were, at the door of the tent, for they could not break through this sad column, and long ere it had come to an end Robert exclaimed with an indrawing of the breath which was much like an inward shudder:—

“Is it possible that all these could have been wounded last night, and yet we four came through with nothing worse than a scratch on the sergeant's face?”

“I allow here isn't a quarter of them who came to grief durin' the assault,” and the old soldier, who

had been attracted to the flap of the tent by the trampling of many feet, gazed at the hundreds which had been maimed in this quarrel between kings, with the air of one to whom such a spectacle is of everyday occurrence. "At close range they should have cut down five times as many, although the matter may wear a different look when we get a list of the dead."

"Did we accomplish anything last night?" Robert whispered to the old soldier.

"I think not, lad. You could see for yourself that the enemy got an inklin' of our purpose, an' the effect of the blow was lost. It was necessary to make some little show, however, and so we were sent in; but I'll go bail the commander-in-chief didn't expect we'd accomplish anything."

"Then all these poor fellows were wounded, and perhaps a great many more killed, simply that we might make a show!"

"Well, it was something like that, lad. War is a game where every move cannot be decisive, an' many lives must be sacrificed in order that those who play it may get into proper position."

"It is a wicked thing! I thought it would be glorious to fight for my king and my country, but it is only a crime!"

"I can't say I'm surprised that you should be a

bit shook up by such a sight as this so early in the mornin'; but you mustn't break out quite so strong, lad. War is necessary for the strength of nations, an' what seems to you wicked now, may have a different complexion when the end can be plainly seen. Come away; this bloody procession may be two or three hours in passin', an' there's no reason why you should work yourself up into a fever over it."

Nicholas was sitting on the ground, his face covered, and with no sign of life save convulsive sobs, which shook his body with the regularity of his breathing.

"There's chance for you to do some good work," the old soldier continued as he motioned toward the trembling boy. "Get him in where he can't see all this, for I doubt not but that the fever of cowardice has a firm hold of him once more."

"It would be strange if he was not affected by such a sight; it is enough to make any one wish he had never dreamed of being a soldier!" Robert muttered, as he bent over Nicholas, raising him gently by the arm until the trembling lad was on his feet.

Then he guided him inside the tent once more, Darius following, and there, screening themselves from the horrible scene, the three lads remained

until Sergeant Prout assured them that the evidences of the previous night's work had been wiped out to a great extent.

Perhaps the old soldier was disappointed because two of the boys did not display more spirit than to quail before a column of wounded, for he made no attempt to engage his young comrades in conversation until the day was well-nigh spent, and then he endeavored to animate them by telling of the vast amount of treasure which it was believed would be found on board the Spanish ships when the fleet was captured.

"There'll be plenty of dollars for all hands," he said with an unusual show of enthusiasm, "an' war won't look so terrible when the gold an' silver comes pourin' into your pockets."

Neither of the boys replied to this, and the old soldier dropped the subject to remind them that as yet they had not breakfasted.

"I'll cook whatever you bring," Robert replied in a low tone; "but it doesn't seem as if I'd ever want anything else to eat."

"Hark ye, lad, you mustn't give way like this, or you'll never be fit for a soldier."

"After this morning I never expect to be, sergeant."

"But you have set down your name as one, which

is the same as promising; you'll do your best at whatever comes by way of duty. Now wounds an' killin' are part of the work, an' since you've got so far on the road as to be in front of a besieged city, it's only right you should fight against such thoughts, as you're indulgin' in. If you hadn't enlisted there might be some reason in cryin' out against the horrors of war; but since you're occupyin' the place of a man, you must be one. You've no right to give way to soft feelin's till this job is finished."

"All you say is true, Sergeant Prout, and I will see to it that you have no further cause to complain of me. This much I've got a right to say, though: War is a wicked, wicked work!"

"I'll agree with you in that much, lad; but it will go on ages an' ages after we're dead, unless somethin' of a like nature is found to take its place. Now turn to an' do cook's duty, while I look around for rations."

The sergeant's recruits did not make a hearty meal on this day, even though breakfast and dinner were served at one and the same time, and when the repast was come to an end the old soldier proposed that they stroll down on the seashore, or as near as the chain of sentinels would permit.

Anything that would take them away from the

tent, which was now grown almost unpleasant as an abiding-place since they had had time to speculate upon the fate of those who previously occupied it; and the lads marched by the side of the sergeant until they were come near to the place where a portion of the troops from New York province were encamped, when they were startled by hearing a mighty shout suddenly go up all around them.

Nicholas started as if fearing bodily injury, and the others were considerably disturbed in mind, until the old soldier cried joyfully:—

“Colonel Putnam’s force has come! Look there, lads! I’ll answer for it they are on yonder transport!”

A ship whose decks were black with men was rounding-to less than a mile from the shore, and already twenty or thirty boats were putting off to her.

“They’ve had a fair wind, and the wonder is she did not get here earlier in the day,” some one standing near Robert cried. “Here be five hundred more to feed the fever, if the Spanish bullets don’t put an end to them before the weather brings it about.”

“Hold your tongue!” Sergeant Prout shouted angrily. “Isn’t it enough that the sickness should be among us, without a king’s soldier turnin’ it into ridicule.”

The man wheeled around to make an impatient reply, and as he faced them the lads saw his face flush suddenly a vivid crimson; his jaw dropped; his tongue protruded, and even as they gazed he fell to the ground as if stricken with instant death.

“What is it? What hurt him?” Robert asked falteringly, and one of the fallen man’s comrades replied moodily as he bent over the sufferer:—

“He’ll make no more sport of the fever, for it has taken him, and by morning a squad will be digging his grave!”

Nicholas turned as if to flee, and Robert seized him by the arm as he whispered:

“It is as the sergeant says; we must keep hold of ourselves now that we are trying to be soldiers. Come back to the tent.”

Nicholas suffered himself to be led away, and Darius accompanied his comrades, leaving the old soldier to watch the disembarkation of the men who had been so near to death through the fury of the sea.

An hour later the sergeant stood before his sorrowful looking recruits as he said:—

“They are all ashore, and sixteen of them have already been put under close guard.”

“Why? Did they try to run away?” Darius asked.

“The prisoners are those who started the mutiny. I told you Colonel Putnam would settle matters with them at the first opportunity, an’ the only wonder to me is that he hasn’t tried them before. Come, we have little time to lose.”

“Surely you can’t think we want to see the poor men who may be shot for giving way to their fears!” Robert exclaimed.

“Hark ye, lads, it’s all very well for you to look on the horrible side of matters when there’s no other view to be taken; but if you’re bent on pitying mutineers, who would perhaps have caused the death of every man aboard the Golden Pippin, then I must put an end to the sympathy. The scoundrels are to be tried within an hour, an’ we’re summoned as witnesses, so stir yourselves, for it ain’t in any ways safe to keep a military court awaitin’ your pleasure.”

The boys knew Sergeant Prout was seriously displeased, otherwise he would not have spoken so harshly to Robert Clement, and the latter said contritely as he made ready to accompany the soldier:—

“I hope you will bear with me yet a little longer, sergeant, and I will try to play my part better. But it seems as if we have more than had our fill of horrors within the past few days, and, coming so suddenly, I was not prepared for them.”

“Say no more, lad, I know you’ll do your best, an’ you can begin by findin’ less fault with what can’t be cured. Now then, are we all ready?”

“Is there any reason why I should go?” Nicholas asked tearfully.

“Of a surety there is. The colonel gave me orders to bring the three lads who held the passage while the mutineers were bent on takin’ possession of the ship.”

“After what happened perhaps he won’t want to see me, unless it be to set me with the others.”

“Now don’t distress yourself unduly, Nicholas Vallet. I agreed that you’re certain to be brought up for havin’ deserted your post; but since then you’ve taken share in the assault in a manner that has pleased old soldiers, an’ you may count for a fact on that’s havin’ great weight with Israel Putnam. Come with us like a man, an’ ’twixt now an’ sunset you’ll have wiped out all that part of your record which isn’t agreeable to think about.”

Ten minutes later the sergeant and his recruits were standing in front of the tent occupied by the members of the court, and surrounded by a throng of curious ones who were eager to learn all the particulars of the mutiny.

Sergeant Prout refused to answer any questions until he had told his story to the officers authorized

to hear it, and not only held his peace despite all entreaties to the contrary, but enjoined upon his comrades to do the same.

Finally they were ushered into the tent, and there, facing the prisoners, each was commanded to give every particular, according to the best of his knowledge and remembrance, of that time when a few men would have endangered the lives of all on board the ship.

To Robert's surprise he saw Captain Tyler among the prisoners, and not until later in the evening did he learn that the ship's master had been arrested within an hour after he had left their tent, while trying to pass the guards with the hope of getting on board one of the transports.

So far as the lads' share in this trial was concerned but little time was spent. Each told his story as best he could, which in Nicholas' case was a rambling manner, and then the four were dismissed.

When they emerged an hundred men would have questioned them closely concerning what they had seen and heard ; but the sergeant hurried them on without regard to the wishes of others, until they were once more inside their own tent.

“Will they try me next ?” Nicholas asked in tremulous tones when they were shut out from view of the curious ones.

“I do not think you need fear anything so harsh as that, lad. In an hour—for I don’t allow the trial of the mutineers will take up more time than that—I’m goin’ to take the liberty of askin’ permission to speak with the colonel, an’ I’m hopin’ the matter can be fixed up in private.”

No one ventured any remark, although all were surprised at learning of the sergeant’s intention, and not a word was spoken until nearly half an hour had passed, when a member of the New Rochelle company entered the tent for the double purpose of bringing an order from Captain Lispenard, and to acquaint them with the finding of the court.

“Five of the mutineers and the master of the Golden Pippin are to be shot,” he said by way of announcing his presence. “The others are to do double duty for the next two months, and suffer a term of imprisonment as soon as we return to New York, if it so be they live so long.”

“Six to be shot!” Darius exclaimed, and Nicholas moaned as if suffering keenest pain.

“Well, they got off easier than I counted on,” Sergeant Prout replied in a matter-of-fact tone. “I allowed that all of them would swing, an’ it would be no more than right, considerin’ what might have happened if Colonel Putnam hadn’t been the man he is.”

“While the Spaniards are shooting so many of our men down, and the fever is laying them by the heels about as fast as one can count, it seems as if it was wasting soldiers for us to kill them,” the visitor said thoughtfully, and then, as if suddenly remembering the prime motive for his coming, he added, “Captain Lispenard will have you take up your quarters with the rest of the company, unless it so be you are detailed for special duty.”

“There is no reason why we shouldn’t join the New Rochelle men. We’ve been hangin’ around to suit ourselves since we arrived here, an’ one place is as good as another, I reckon,” the sergeant replied carelessly. “When does the execution come off?”

“At sunrise, and I’m told the firing squad will be detailed from those who were on board the ship.”

Having thus delivered his message and his news, the soldier took his departure, and the three lads sat looking at each other in silent terror, for if the executioners were to be chosen from those who took passage in the Golden Pippin, it was barely possible one or all of them might be among the number selected.

Ignorant of their thoughts, Sergeant Prout went at once to put his newly-formed plan into execution, and a more wretched hour than the boys spent during his absence it would be difficult to imagine.

Neither dared to speak, for his thoughts were too terrible to be put into words. In silence they sat staring at each other, starting in terror at the slightest unusual sound, and trembling at each approaching footstep lest it should mark the coming of one who had authority to detail them among the executioners.

The old soldier was in the best of spirits when he returned. It was as if he had entirely forgotten those wretched men who were to be put to death when the sun showed himself again, and as if death was not a close companion with every member of the invading army.

“I reckon you’re all right now, lad!” he exclaimed as he entered, giving no heed to the attitude of his recruits, because of the darkness which shut them out from view.

“Then there’s no fear we’ll be chosen for the firing party!” Robert cried, forgetting for the instant the purpose of the sergeant’s visit to headquarters.

“For the firing party? Who allowed you might be detailed?”

“No one; but it was said a squad would be chosen from the troops who had been on board the Golden Pippin,” Robert replied hesitatingly.

“And did you think half-baked soldiers like you three would be put on such duty?”

“We were afraid it might so happen.”

“Then you can put the matter out of your mind at once, though you’ll be ordered on parade, unless we’re sent into the trenches ’twixt now an’ midnight.”

“Do you mean that we’d have to look at it?” Nicholas cried shrilly.

“Sure. They are to be shot that the rest of us will learn a lesson, an’ how could that be done if we stayed away? But why talk of what’s to happen tomorrow mornin’, when we’ve got other matters to think of? I’ve seen the colonel.”

“Did he say anything about me?” Nicholas asked with mild curiosity.

“Of course he did. Wasn’t that what I went to see him for? I allowed to fix your business up in short order, an’ I’ve done it.”

Now the boys were aroused from their apathy of horror, and displayed no little eagerness to learn the result of the interview.

“I’ve got this much to say for Israel Putnam before I begin my story,” the old soldier said as he seated himself on the ground near Robert’s side. “He didn’t bring up the case of the mutineers for the sake of showin’ his authority; but because he believed it was necessary for the good of the army that he should do so. I’ve been told that he said all

he could in the court to get a lighter sentence for them as were condemned to be shot, an' I know for a fact that he's taken the matter a deal to heart. I reckon because of that I had less trouble to pull Nicholas out of his scrape."

"Then you succeeded?" Darius cried eagerly.

"Yes, lad, after a fashion. I didn't count on doin' the job right up without any whys and wherefores, an' I may say it's ended in easier shape than I expected. I begun by tellin' the colonel plumply why I'd come, 'cause no man likes plain, square dealin' better than does Israel Putnam. He seemed real pleased to know the lad had been with us all the time, an' you may be certain I didn't cut the story short when I told how Nicholas saved my life, or what he did durin' the assault. He listened without so much as openin' his mouth till I'd finished the whole yarn, an' then asked what I thought would be about right? I wasn't expectin' any question like that, an' it flustered me; but after a spell I managed to blurt out that I thought it might be dropped right where it was without any harm to the service."

"Did he agree to that?" Darius asked incredulously.

"I can't say as he did, that is, not right off. He did agree though, that considerin' what Nicholas

had done since, it would be wrong to bring him up for a regular trial, and this is the way he's settled the whole case: 'We'll leave the matter exactly where it is, sergeant, and the lad shall decide it,' he said to me as friendly and sociable like as if we was two brothers. 'If he turns to now and does his full duty, as you seem to believe he will, well and good; but in case he shows signs of insubordination again, we'll take up the subject in full, and you can judge whether I'll be likely to give him a second chance.' "

"Did the matter end right there?" Darius cried excitedly.

"That's the whole of the talk in a nutshell. I wasn't such a fool as to hang 'round after my business had been done, and he'd no sooner said what I've repeated than I come away, after saluting, of course."

"There, Nicholas!" Robert cried triumphantly. "All which looked so black against you is wiped out completely, and you stand on exactly the same footing Darius and I do. What could be more comfortable than that!"

Nicholas made no reply. He was seated near the flap of the tent as when the news was brought of the finding of the military court, and, so far as his comrades could say, he had not moved since the fate of the mutineers was announced.

Nor did he move now.

He neither replied nor even looked up, but remained with bent head and eyes fixed upon the ground as if he saw there, something of vital importance to himself.

Darius arose with an air of impatience, and would have approached the lad, probably for the purpose of forcing him to speak, but Sergeant Prout checked him with a gesture as he stepped outside the tent, motioning the two boys to follow his example.

When he was so far away that his words would not be overheard by the motionless lad inside, he whispered :—

“ Leave him alone till mornin’. He’s had enough to scare a bolder boy than he, an’ it maybe he don’t rightly understand yet how the matter is fixed. Leave him alone, an’ he’ll come around all right, I’m hopin’.”

CHAPTER XIV.

ADMIRAL POCOCK'S ATTACK.

WHEN Robert and Darius returned to the tent Nicholas was lying upon the ground apparently asleep, and they took good care not to disturb him.

The hearts of these lads were sore on this night, for while loitering about in the vicinity of their quarters in order that Nicholas might be left alone for the time, they had heard the men discussing the events of the morrow, when the mutineers and the master of the Golden Pippin would be brought out for execution, and they came to understand beyond a question that all the troops, save those absolutely on duty, would be forced to be present when these six men were sent into eternity because of their misdeeds, and in order that others might profit by the lesson.

During this time they were allowing Nicholas for meditation, they had seen two men stricken with the fever, and learned by the conversation which followed after the unfortunate ones were carried

away, that the sick-list had increased fully ten per cent. during the last twenty-four hours, owing, it was believed, to the coming of these new recruits who, after many days spent on shipboard in narrow, unwholesome quarters, were fit subjects for this most horrible disease.

Sergeant Prout did not return with them to the tent ; but, alleging that he had some business which must be attended to without delay, left the lads when they had decided that Nicholas' privacy might be broken in upon.

When the boys entered the quarters their gloomy thoughts were increased rather than diminished, as for at least the twentieth time they looked around upon the canvas walls and asked themselves how many of all those who had occupied the tent since it was set up on the island of Cuba, were yet alive.

After a time Robert so far succeeded in banishing the train of frightful figures which appeared before his mental vision, as to remember that Captain Lispernard had sent a positive order for them to join their company, and he wondered idly if the sergeant had forgotten the matter.

It is safe to say that each of these three lads yearned that night for his mother, as mayhap he had never yearned before, although since the mo-

ment the *Golden Pippin* sailed out of the port of New York they had been at frequent intervals sorely and wretchedly homesick.

They had hungered for one glimpse of their mothers' faces; one word of sympathy or affection from their mothers' lips, and this during nearly every waking hour; but never before had they been so thoroughly wretched in mind. Kindly sleep came to their relief much sooner than either of them anticipated, and despite all the causes for anxiety, for sorrow, and for fear, they did not awaken to consciousness until next morning when the old soldier put an end to their dreams by crying in a cheery voice:—

“Now then, lads, if you want to see what but few men ever have seen, it's time to be movin'.”

Nicholas was on his feet as soon as either of his companions, and the look of utter despair which had been upon his face the evening previous was not to be seen.

He was almost merry in his anticipation of duties to be performed, until like a flash of light came the remembrance of that which he had heard the night previous. The execution—the parade of the troops, that each man might take to heart the lesson to be learned—the firing squad—the last dreadful act!

He turned pale, and, noting this, Robert and

Darius understood why the expression on his face had changed so suddenly and so completely.

Both the lads grew sick at heart, and had the order been given at that moment for them to march in the ranks of Captain Lispenard's company across the plain to that spot where the long trench had been dug which would serve as a grave for the six condemned, it is doubtful if they could have exercised control over their limbs.

“Now then, lads, get a hold of yourselves, for it is only fancy which is playing you this trick. There will be no parade for you this mornin’; that is over this hour past. I went to Captain Lispenard last night an’ begged that you three lads be spared the scene which the mornin’ sun looked down upon. He granted it by winkin’ at our neglect of duty. Had we changed quarters last night, nothin’ save the fact of your bein’ on the sick-list could have saved you from marchin’ out with the rest of the force; but so long as we stayed here we were separated from our command, so to speak, and did not get the orders to fall in.”

Robert silently thanked the old soldier by clasping his hand, and the expression in the eyes of Darius and Nicholas told that they were not one whit the less grateful for his thoughtful kindness.

“You will remember what I have said time an’

again, that the first care of a good soldier is to look after his body, an' we'll begin this day aright, as I'm countin' on beginnin' all the days we spend on this island, if it please God we are permitted finally to depart. Regular livin', niggardliness in the matter of drinkin' water, an' the shunnin' of fruit and unwholesome food, will do more toward fightin' off the feyer than all the doctors' drugs you could swallow. We'll begin by havin' breakfast, an' then, as I said when I roused you, you'll have a chance to see what few men ever have witnessed—a fleet of forty-seven ships of the line, frigates an' bomb-ketches in action. It will be a marvelous sight, lads, an' go to make up a great story for you to tell when once we're back in New Rochelle. More than two thousand cannon, providin' the Spanish fleet open fire, as of course they're bound to do, will be blazin' away, off an' on, before the action has come to an end."

"Is there to be a battle to-day?" Darius asked with an odd mixture of eagerness and timidity.

"Ay, lad, a battle between the fleets—a battle of cannons instead of men. I got it from Lieutenant Le Conte that the men-of-war would open fire on the fortifications some time this forenoon, an' he declares, strange as it may seem, that the army is to take no part in the action. Now I am only a

non-commissioned officer, an' have no right to say that my superiors ought to do this thing or the other, at the same time I'm free to confess that never before did I hear of a bombardment when the land force did not back it up by an assault."

"But one was made last night," Robert suggested.

"Ay, lad, so much we know, but what's puzzlin' me is, why that assault wasn't postponed until this day, or why the fleets didn't open fire yesterday to cover our attack? I'm allowin' my Lord Albemarle an' Admiral Sir George Pocock have forgotten more about the business of fightin' than I ever knew; but at the same time I'd give a good deal to have it explained why we were rushed up against the Spanish fortifications last night when there wasn't one chance in a thousand that anything could be effected? I'd like to know why the naval force kept quiet, or what amounted to the same thing, an' then, why Admiral Pocock makes an attack all by himself to-day, with the land forces hangin' back?"

"Perhaps the admiral counts on battering down the fort," Darius suggested, whereat the old soldier burst forth vehemently:—

"Well, an' suppose he should do it? We're countin' he can effect somethin' with the powder

an' ball he'll waste. What if he does make a breach in the walls, an' we of the army are here, instead of bein' in readiness to take advantage of it? To batter a hole through Morro Castle is of little moment, so that the enemy are allowed to repair damages!"

"It may be that Lieutenant Le Conte is mistaken, and we shall find ourselves called on for hot work," Robert said in a tone calculated to soothe the old man's anger.

"It may be, lad, it may be, an' we'll hope that such is the case."

"Hope?" Darius repeated. "Are you really eager, Sergeant Prout, to go into battle?"

"Not for the sake of gettin' in where I may come out dead, or of riskin' the chance to lose a leg or an arm; but it is better all of us go in, whatever the danger, than lay here in the camp where the fever an' the sun are strikin' down ten times as many as ever the Spaniards could in the same length of time. But there!" the old man added quickly as he saw the troubled look which came over his young comrades' faces at this reminder of the silent enemy against which they were powerless. "There is no reason to call up anythin' of that kind. Most likely both the commander-in-chief an' the admiral are doin' what is best, an' I'm only a croakin' fool for puttin' in my oar when there's no call for it. We'd

better be gettin' breakfast than standin' here findin' fault with our superiors."

The boys were naturally eager to witness the movements of the fleet, and, fearful lest they might miss any of the maneuvers, hurried forward their preparations for the morning meal with the utmost despatch.

Robert stirred water into the meal until it was of the proper consistency, added a pinch of salt, and set the cake to bake on a piece of board in front of the fire which Nicholas had hastily built. Sergeant Prout brewed the tea in a battered pannikin which he often proudly declared he had carried during one entire campaign, and Darius cut the salt pork into slices so thick that his mother would have insisted they could not be properly cooked.

When the hurriedly-eaten meal was come to an end the boys gathered up their scanty equipage in accordance with the sergeant's commands, and obeyed the orders sent by Captain Lispenard the night previous, by taking up their quarters with the New Rochelle company.

Each of the four comrades had feared that he would be forced to share the tent with several others, once he was with the New York troops; but in this all were happily mistaken. Sickness and the bullets of the Spaniards had thinned the

ranks of the recruits—even of those so lately arrived—until the majority of the tents had but two or three occupants, and Sergeant Prout and his young comrades were as comfortably quartered after the change of location, as before.

“I’m not certain but that we’re considerably better off,” the old soldier said in a tone of content as he gazed around the new camp. “Here we are so much nearer the sea, an’ accordin’ to my way of thinkin’ that counts for a good bit in this climate. We’re further away from the water supply, such as it is, an’ perhaps that’s a benefit, because we’ve agreed to drink sparingly, an’ when it isn’t convenient to hand we shan’t feel thirsty so often. Now then, lads, seein’ that we’ve a deal to be thankful for—which is what we should think of rather than be huntin’ for cause to complain—we’ll stroll out as near the coast as is safe until we get a good location for viewin’ the exhibition the admiral is gettin’ up for our pleasure. After to-day, so Captain Lisperard tells me, we shall do our share of work in the trenches; we’ve been allowed to loaf, thus far, so to speak, as a reward for havin’ made the journey overland from where the Golden Pippin was wrecked to this encampment. Shut your eyes to all that’s disagreeable, an’ ’twixt now an’ sundown shall be our holiday.”

Then the sergeant led his recruits out through the long rows of tents and shelters of brush to the higher land near the ocean, where in the offing could be seen the multitude of ships rising and falling on the heavy swell, giving but little evidence at that moment of their power for destructiveness.

That English vessel lying nearest Morro Castle was considerably the largest of the fleet, and Sergeant Prout said as he pointed her out:—

“There’s the Namur, a ninety-gun ship of the line, carrying Admiral Pocock’s flag, an’ captained by no less a man than that same Harrison who has earned his commission twenty times over in these waters. I’m thinkin’ she will open the game; but whether she does or no, the signals which send the other ships into action must be displayed from her riggin’, therefore she’s the craft you’d best keep your eye on.”

Sergeant Prout’s recruits were not the only ones in the encampment who had learned of the intended engagement, and were eager to witness it.

It was as if every English soldier not actually on duty had gathered at the most advantageous points along the coast, until no less than seven-eighths of the able-bodied men in that besieging army fringed the shore for a distance of a mile or more.

The spectators were not kept long in suspense.

Although the *Namur* was nearly if not quite a mile and a half away, the watchers could see tiny specks of color run up to her masthead, and then broken out, streaming to the breeze in such fashion as formed for those who could read the English naval code, orders as distinct as if they had been written down in the fairest text. From one and another of the mighty squadron went up the answering pennant, whereupon the *Namur* stood boldly in toward Morro Castle, her crew at quarters, and, even as could be seen from the shore, everything in the best possible trim for battle.

At this moment a series of butterfly flags were run up on the flagstaff of Morro Castle, and as the boys, acting upon the sergeant's suggestion, directed their gaze toward the spars of the Spanish fleet which could be seen above the land while the vessels lay in the inner harbor, more flame-like wisps of color appeared on each topmast-head until it was as if the ships of both navies were suddenly bent on showing all the bunting in their lockers.

“The Spaniards in the fort have told the Spaniards on the vessels that the English are gettin' ready for business, an' now we'll see what the bull-fighters propose doin' about it,” Sergeant Prout said grimly. “If Admiral Pocock hopes to entice that fleet out

of their snug place of refuge, I'm inclined to believe he'll be disappointed."

By this time the boys had no further desire to look toward the inner harbor. Now all the English fleet was in motion, every vessel coming shoreward with a billow of foam at her bow, her sails shining like silver in the morning sun, and each keeping her position in the line as if she was moored stem and stern to her fellows.

More than one of the spectators on shore were seamen, or at least had had so much to do with the sea that they could fully appreciate the picture which the English fleet presented at this moment, and they burst forth into acclamations until the shouts came near to drowning the report of the *Namur's* guns as she let fly a full broadside at the Spanish stronghold.

This done, Captain Harrison wore ship, and as the majestic fabric came around, all her sails shivering, the *Marlborough* of sixty-eight guns came up to the firing station.

As she in turn wore, the *Culloden*, a seventy-four-gun ship of the line, took her station, and thus it was one succession of broadsides from such ships as the *Orford*, *Pembroke*, *Valiant*, *Centaur*, *Cambridge*, and on through that long chain which numbered twenty-three ships of the line and twenty frigates, each vessel

discharging one broadside at Morro Castle, with hardly more than four-minute intervals.

A great cloud of white, wool-like smoke ascended as each ship delivered her fire, and the cannon from Morro and Punta, answering almost gun for gun, sent up equal quantities of the pungent vapor until it was as if the heavens had fallen over that particular headland of the island.

By the time the seventy-four-gun ship *Dragon* had discharged her broadside, a movement could be seen among the Spanish fleet. Every spar was clothed with glistening white cloths, and the stately vessels moved out toward the entrance of the harbor as if bent on accepting the challenge which Admiral Pocock had thrown down.

“That ship in the lead is *El Tigre* of seventy guns, commanded by the admiral and commander-in-chief, the Marquis del Real Transporte,” a member of the 34th, Lord Cavendish’s regiment, who was standing near by the boys, said in an explanatory tone, and all in that vicinity knew his information to be correct, because the 34th was among the first of the besiegers, and its members had had ample time to become acquainted with the vessels of the enemy. “The second craft is the *El Infanta* of seventy guns; then comes the *El Soverano*, the *La Reyna* and the *El Aquilon*, all seventy-gun ships.”

He continued to name the vessels in order as they sailed slowly on toward the outer harbor until fifteen were under way, and the spectators worked themselves into a fever of excitement, for it seemed certain the Spanish admiral was minded to give battle.

By this time the English fleet were sailing nearly in a circle, the *Namur* leading, and the frigate *Peggy* bringing up the rear.

It was no longer possible to distinguish the outlines of *Morro*, *Punta*, or any portion of that fortified point opposite the city, so dense were the clouds of smoke which overhung the land and the waters, and shut out from view fully one-fifth of all the English ships.

So heavy were the vibrations of the air that it seemed to the boys as if the very land quaked under the concussions, and one would fain hold his hands over his ears because of the pain caused by the waves of sound.

“There go the Spaniards!” some one shouted as *El Tigre’s* spars disappeared within the white shroud of smoke, and then eagerly the spectators watched to see her come from out that sulphurous smother.

As the moments went by, one after another of the English ships moved up on their circle until lost to view of the watchers on the shore; then was heard

the crash of the guns, and each in turn reappeared, all with nearly mathematical regularity; but the spars of the Spaniards did not show beyond that white, fleecy, rolling mass of smoke.

Half an hour went by. The *Namur* was standing in toward the shore once more, having closed well up on the *Peggy*, and one of the recruits who was more sailor than soldier, shouted scornfully:—

“The Spaniards dare not leave their place of refuge!”

“What has become of them then?” Sergeant Prout asked in perplexity. “We can no longer see their spars.”

“And because of such fact we may know they are hugging the shore near Morro, from whence they can run back into the inner harbor if the fire becomes too hot. I warrant you Admiral Pocock would fight them ship for ship, and gun and gun, if the Dons dared come out to meet him.”

But the Spanish ships did not leave the harbor.

Two complete circles did every English vessel make; two broadsides did each ship or frigate fire full at the old castle's face. Twice was each of the king's vessels exposed to the shot of the Spanish fortifications and the Spanish fleet, and then tiny flames of color were sent aloft on the *Namur*, signaling that the battle was over.

Once more King George's ships rode at their proper stations, and the sailors who manned them were busily engaged in refitting spar or stay which had been shot away, for hardly one had come out unscathed from that iron hail.

And what of the enemy?

The smoke yet hung in heavy clouds about the point, shutting out both ship and fort.

That much damage had been inflicted there could be no question; but the spectators on the shore gave good proof by their shouts and exclamations that they shared Sergeant Prout's opinion when he said, taking good care not to speak so that his words might be overheard by any of the line officers:—

“It's a deadly shame to spend all that ammunition for naught save to show what we can do when occasion arises. Had the same number of shot been sent into the fortifications while we were makin' the assault, I'll answer for it with my head, that by this time the city would be ours!”

CHAPTER XV.

A SALLY.

BEFORE the recruits had embarked at New York, Sergeant Prout complained often of their ignorance concerning even the rudiments of the profession they had temporarily adopted.

“A man cannot be a soldier until he has got so far along in the drill as to lose himself, so to speak, in the file, platoon, or column where he may belong.”

This remark, and others similar to it, had been repeated by him while the regiment was yet encamped on the common in New York, many times without provoking an answer from either of his young recruits; but the moment came, however, when Darius said almost petulantly, replying to the assertion above quoted:—

“A man can be enough of a soldier to get himself killed, even if he don't know the drill.”

“That's where you're wrong, lad. I'm willin' to make a statement now, an' prove it durin' the next engagement we're in, that a recruit can't even go to

receive his death-wound in proper fashion, until he knows how to line up his part of the formation.”

The old sergeant would have cried out against sending men to face the enemy before they had received a reasonable amount of instruction—that is to say, he would have done so in private—but for the fact that it was generally understood the drilling of the recruits would begin in good earnest once they arrived on the island of Cuba.

But when they had arrived, and the men were prostrated by heat even while taking the least possible amount of exercise, and while the fever fiend stalked through the encampment dealing death on every hand, it was understood that it would be little less than murder to order the men out on the hot sand under the broiling sun to march and counter-march, or even to practise the manual of arms.

Therefore it was that the recruits from North America, as a body, knew very little regarding even the rudiments of their newly-adopted profession. There were many among them, like Sergeant Prout, and nearly all the officers, who had served in the ranks of the king's army before, and upon this sprinkling of soldiers devolved the duty of holding together, in something at least approaching military semblance, the mass of volunteers from the provinces.

The only time when all the recruits from North America were assembled on parade in front of the besieged city, was shortly before sunrise on the morning after the naval demonstration.

A sorry looking force they were as compared with their appearance in the city of New York.

Already more than six hundred had been stricken down by the fever, or prostrated by heat, and of those who stood in line to listen to the words of advice or command from General Lyman, not a tenth part of them but were wan and haggard looking. Those not already enervated by the climate were in a great measure incapacitated by the fears which beset them, and it was not strange that brave men should cower and shrink before such a dread enemy as the Spaniards had for an ally.

General Lyman's purpose in thus assembling that portion of the army under his command, was to give the men good advice as to their mode of living, and he addressed them rather as companions-in-arms than subordinates.

He first endeavored to raise their drooping spirits, by stating that it was within the power of any man to ward off, in a certain measure, the deadly effects of the climate. He showed, by citing individual cases, that those recruits from North America who had already been stricken with fever or prostrated

by heat, and invited such an attack; in a number of cases it was through indulgence in strong drink; many had unquestionably been guilty of intemperance in eating, and not a few exposed themselves unnecessarily.

“It is not true, that which I have heard spoken of among the rank and file of this army,” he said. “It is not true that the fever will in time seize upon each of you. You have made a decided change of climate, and almost entirely reversed your methods of living. Such being the case, it behoves you to take exceptionally good care of your bodies, and this would be the fact wherever you might be placed. Avoid unnecessary exposure. There are times when the exigencies of war demand extraordinary exposure. Prepare for such by temperate, even frugal habits, in eating, in drinking, and in spending your idle time. Keep far from you the foolish idea that your turn must surely come. Practise cleanliness; so far as may be in your power, preserve the utmost regularity as to eating and sleeping, and in every way fight as soldiers against an unseen enemy.”

Very much more than is set down here did he give in the way of good advice; but the greater effect of his words was lost when four of the men fell writhing to the ground as he spoke, and their comrades knew

that at least one of those was among the most careful and prudent of the regiment.

Squads were detailed to carry the unfortunate men to the hospital, and while this was being done General Lyman did his best to show that the exception to the rule he had laid down, was no proof that his statements were incorrect.

Perhaps on the whole the recruits were benefited by his remarks; but there were many who, when parade had been dismissed, loudly declared that there was nothing which could be done in the way of relief, save to raise the siege without delay.

It was another, but feeble, show of insubordination, despite the lesson which had been given by the execution, and Colonel Putnam took immediate steps toward checking such spirit before it should have grown strong, by announcing to the troops from Connecticut that he would show no mercy to those who incited mutiny. He also laid down certain rules which were read as orders to his men, and the penalty for drinking unclean water was greater than for negligence of military affairs.

Sergeant Prout and his recruits went directly to their own tent immediately parade was dismissed, and certain it is that General Lyman's address had not tended to make the three lads more comfortable in mind. His words had suggested yet greater

dangers which threatened and, observing their down-cast looks, the old soldier said sternly when they were alone :—

“ I have been on this island before, an’ left a good home to come back again, which goes to prove that the fever an’ the sun don’t kill every man from the provinces who steps his foot here. You lads now are in the proper condition to be attacked by sickness, for I know by experience that he who fears or anticipates a disease is the first to be seized by it. Now let me see more cheerful faces on you three, else it is my purpose to take you in hand after such a fashion as won’t seem friendly. The general said that cleanliness was the one great weapon with which to fight the fever, and we’ll begin by usin’ it. I doubt not but that permission can be had to go through the lines for so much salt water as will serve to give us a bath, and after that has been done we’ll set about idlin’ in a reasonable manner.”

It was destined, however, that the sergeant’s recruits should not have the opportunity of trying the efficacy of this treatment, for before the old soldier’s proposition could be carried into effect, Orderly Bridges presented himself at the flap of the tent, as he said :—

“ By Captain Lispenard’s orders, you four, together with six others from the New Rochelle com-

pany, will take your turn of duty in the trenches to-day. You will fall in at once in front of the captain's tent."

This was an order which the lads had every reason to expect would have been given very shortly, therefore no one was surprised, and the boys made haste to obey it, following the sergeant's example.

Ten men had been detailed from the New Rochelle company for the work of the day, and very shortly after Sergeant Prout and his recruits arrived at the point designated, they were marched across the encampment to where three hundred or more men had been drawn up in line.

Here perhaps ten minutes were spent awaiting the arrival of others who were to share in the labor, and then the detachment was marched forward, down the long lines of trenches or pits, where the command was divided into squads, each entering the parallel to which it had been ordered, and proceeding under the direction of proper officers to their respective stations.

Sergeant Prout and his companions were posted within half a musket-shot of the fortifications to the westward, and the arduous work of the day was begun—that work which had already cost the king more than had the bullets of the Spaniards.

"What are we to do here?" Robert asked, looking

about him as he stood musket in hand, his head barely above the surface.

“Keep a close watch on the fortifications, and if a Spaniard shows himself, shoot with steady aim. It is not well that you are too bold, for there will be eyes the other side that wall of masonry searching for a target as sharply as are you.”

As if to emphasize the sergeant's words, at that instant a tiny puff of smoke was seen from one of the loop-holes, and the ping of a bullet as it buried itself in the earthworks within twelve inches of Robert's head, told how close a watch the enemy was keeping.

“You can see, lad, it's a case of our lives or theirs,” the sergeant said calmly as he brushed from his face the grains of sand which had been thrown up by the missile. “It's a game which a man must watch closely, else he's like to be sent out of it very suddenly.”

No one had observed Nicholas from the moment they entered the trench, and now it was only by chance that Darius looked toward him.

He saw the lad cowering under the shelter of the embankment, trembling as if with an ague fit, his white face drawn and distorted.

Another spasm of fear had taken possession of him, and again his courage failed entirely. He

could march boldly with his fellows into the very midst of the bullets when there was the excitement of a battle to intoxicate him ; but this standing quietly in one spot, a target for those who would kill, was more than he could bear up under.

Nor was Nicholas Vallet alone in his terror on this day.

Fully one-half of all the men in the trenches were those recruits lately arrived, and it is safe to say that at least one out of every three was at that moment exhibiting as much fear as did the lad from New Rochelle.

Sergeant Prout understood full well the agony which the boy was suffering, and he was not disposed to blame him severely.

“ I’ll admit it is a hard place, Nicholas, this standin’ in the trenches, an’ old soldier as I am, I have not yet got into that state of trainin’ which enables me to face an unseen enemy with the proper degree of calmness. There is this much to be borne in mind, lad : It is more dangerous to run than to stand still, because by movement you give the Spaniards due notice. Remain where you are ; fight it out with yourself, an’ find satisfaction in the fact that you are not like to be sent in here more than once out of every four days.

“ I am not like to be sent in again,” Nicholas

replied, his teeth chattering with fear until it was almost impossible to distinguish the words. "I shall not live to go out."

"Nonsense, lad! Thousands upon thousands of men have gone into trenches where they were exposed to more danger than you are here, and yet the greater number of them have lived to laugh at their fears. And I'm not certain there is anything to laugh at either! He who can stand here an' say he has no fear, is a man who lacks in common-sense, an' I question whether he couldn't rightly be called a fool."

Then the sergeant, stationing himself a little apart from the others that he might serve as an example, did his best at taking the thoughts of his recruits from their danger by telling stories of what he had experienced in this engagement or in that; of the narrow escapes for life when it had seemed that death must surely overtake him, and taking good care that each of his anecdotes should paint the peril much greater than the dangers of the moment, in order that they might find some comfort by the comparison.

Neither Robert nor Darius could laugh at Nicholas, for both were terrified to such a degree that it was impossible to conceal the fact.

During the first half-hour Darius did not so much as

show his head above the surface, and Robert dared only stand up now and then. As the time wore on, however, the latter gained more confidence, until he could argue with himself that duty demanded he should remain on the alert as did the old soldier, and when finally he stood erect, Darius made bold to follow his example.

But Nicholas, crouching at the bottom of the trench, was no longer a reasoning being.

His comrades knew full well that, had he dared, the lad would have run away regardless of duty, or of horror, and they also believed that so great was his terror he did not suffer as much as another might, for he failed to realize all which was going on about him—he was in a stupor of fear.

The blinding sun beat down upon these recruits from New Rochelle until it was as if they stood within the walls of a heated furnace. If any breath of air was stirring they knew it not, because it failed to reach them. At times it seemed literally impossible they could breathe, and the perspiration streamed from every pore until their scanty remnant of clothing was saturated as if by a plunge in the sea.

It was ten o'clock in the forenoon. As the day grew older the atmosphere would grow hotter, and Robert no longer wondered that strong men could suddenly be stricken down by the rays of the sun.

“We are like to be roasted here,” Darius said with a feeble attempt at a smile. “I think it must be hotter than in my mother’s oven when it has been made ready for the baking of beans on a Saturday night.”

“Perhaps not quite as bad as that, lad; but I grant you there is as much as we can well stand,” Sergeant Prout replied, and he appeared to be on the point of saying more when there was a sudden fusilade of shot from the parallel next beyond, accompanied by cries of alarm or of warning.

So great was the uproar that even Nicholas was aroused from his stupor, and leaped to his feet.

“What has happened? What has happened?” he cried in a tremulous voice, and the sergeant, shading his eyes with his hand, looked anxiously around while one might have counted twenty, before he discovered the cause.

Then an exclamation of something very like dismay burst from his lips, and, following the direction of his gaze, Robert looked toward the frowning walls of the fortification, when he saw what seemed at the moment to be a vast flood of Spanish soldiers pouring out over the embankment in an irresistible tide.

They overran the trenches, driving out the defenders and hewing them down mercilessly.

Cries of anger and screams of pain arose on the air above the crackle of musketry, until it was like unto the roar and wailing of the surf.

The encampment was alarmed. Word had gone back that the Spaniards were making a sally, and all the troops would soon be drawn up in battle array. Meanwhile those devoted men in the trenches, who were outnumbered fifty to one, must stand the brunt and shock of the battle with no more hope of offering resistance to the human tide than if they were reeds by the seashore with a tidal wave sweeping down upon them.

As if by instinct Sergeant Prout and Robert discharged their muskets full at the on-coming force, and then the former, pushing the lads in front of him, cried hoarsely :—

“Run, lads, an’ for your lives. Now is the time when a man may retreat without shame; now has come the moment when our only hope is in the fleetness of our feet.”

It was impossible for the four to make much progress toward the rear after the first ten yards had been traversed, for then they came upon their companions who were doing duty in this vicinity, and so many were there that the trench became choked.

Allowing themselves to be blinded by fear, these raw recruits had begun the flight in a body, tread-

ing upon the heels of those in advance until some were overthrown, forming a barrier in the excavation which could not be overridden save at the expense of exposing one's self to the fire of the enemy, who were bearing swiftly down upon them.

Some, in a frenzy of terror, or, perhaps, bolder than the others, clambered outside the trench, and would have run across the plain; but before taking a dozen steps they were riddled with bullets.

Nicholas and Darius would have thrown themselves headlong into this struggling mass, but Sergeant Prout seized both by the throat, pulling them backward, and literally choking them into obedience.

“You can effect nothing that way, lads! It is certain death if you join issues with those who are helpless. Robert Clement, lay hold of Darius; fell him with the butt of your musket, if it may not be done otherwise, but keep him back!”

It was not necessary Robert should obey this command, for as the sergeant spoke Darius had gained control of himself, and understood now of a surety that his only safety lay in obedience. Yet it did not seem possible that life could be prolonged by any means for many moments, for the Spaniards were not making prisoners; but striking deadly blows right and left among those who had been

taken so thoroughly by surprise as to be incapable of resistance.

The sergeant had thrown away his musket. He held Nicholas before him as he rapidly advanced toward the on-coming enemy, and just for an instant Robert hesitated to follow his example.

If it was death to retreat, how much more certain was it that life would be sacrificed if they advanced toward the point where thousands upon thousands were sweeping down upon them?

The lad recovered possession of his common-sense so quickly that it was hardly as if he had hesitated, and, clasping Darius by the hand, the two ran after their older comrade until he halted near where were lying several intrenching tools.

“Keep a firm hold of Nicholas!” the sergeant cried hurriedly as he seized a pick and begun cutting away underneath the embankment, striking such blows as brought down great masses of earth, and it was as if no more than twenty seconds had thus been spent when he had made such an excavation as would serve to partially screen all four of them.

Now Robert and Darius understood the plan which Sergeant Prout had in mind, and, wild and impracticable as it would have seemed at any other moment, they hailed this shallow hole in the side

of the trench as a timely refuge which might save them from death.

The enemy had continued to advance on the double-quick, evidently with the intention of cutting their way through the lines of the besiegers, who, taken by surprise, could not be expected to offer such a spirited resistance as otherwise would have been the case.

The solid ranks were hardly more than fifty yards away when the sergeant and his recruits crept beneath the embankment, and they were no more than in position when the screams and wails from beyond, nearer the rear, told that the foremost of the enemy had come upon that throng of maddened men in the trench.

The trampling of feet caused the earth to vibrate, and as the four crouched beneath, within the shallow excavation, a mass of sand immediately above was forced down by the weight of the advancing column, burying them alive.

CHAPTER XVI.

BY LAND AND SEA.

WHEN the sand fell, burying completely Sergeant Prout and his recruits, Robert believed that death in this strange guise had overtaken them.

It seemed certain the entire embankment had broken away beneath the pressure put upon it by the charging column, and he felt confident the Spaniards were marching over them—that it would be impossible to make their way out of this grave.

In the merest fraction of time his memory called up mental pictures of the past, until he lived over again all the main incidents of his life. He saw his mother as when he parted from her, and fancy, going forth into the future, showed her to him as when the news should be carried to New Rochelle that he and his comrades had been missing from the day the Spaniards made their desperate sally.

It was this mental glimpse of her face, drawn with deep lines of grief because of his death, that caused Robert Clement to struggle desperately

against the yielding bonds which held him in closer embrace than could iron bands.

The first sensations of this entombment were not painful, and but for the pictures his fancy painted he might have remained inactive, lulled by that languid sense which comes with the first approach of suffocation, until it would have been too late to struggle.

He appeared to be separated from his comrades—shut out by that shroud of sand, and so confused was he by the sudden and unexpected imprisonment that he lost all idea of the direction in which the open air might soonest be gained.

Probably hardly more than two or three seconds had sufficed for all this to go through his mind, and then he was twisting and writhing, working with both feet and hands to gain sufficient space in which to exert his strength.

As was soon seen, the Spaniards were not marching directly above where, with his three comrades, he lay buried, nor had the whole depth of the bank fallen in. Three feet, perhaps, of the loose sand covered them, and when Robert succeeded in forcing his head and shoulders out through the stifling, irritating mass of heated particles, he saw the sergeant's face directly in front of him.

“Darius is near by you!” the old soldier said



“When Robert succeeded in forcing his head out through the stifling mass he saw the sergeant directly in front of him.”—Page 262.

At the Siege of Havana.

hurriedly. "I have Nicholas almost out. Work quickly, lad, or your comrade will be suffocated!"

There was no need of urging Robert to make haste. He understood only too well that death must follow if the lad was not speedily drawn to the surface, and regarding not the noises of the conflict above him, nor the heat which was so great as seemingly to burn the skin, he labored with frantic haste.

From the moment the sergeant and his recruits were enveloped by the sand, until the heads of all were freed from the yielding, stifling embrace, less than sixty seconds had probably elapsed, and yet in that brief space of time the tide of battle had receded.

As was afterward understood, the sight of two thousand or more Englishmen who had quickly formed in rank, caused the Spaniards to change their course, and this portion of the trench was left, momentarily, beyond the danger line.

"That was a narrow shave, boys; a closer one than I ever had, even in the heat of battle, for had that column of Dons kept on as they were coming when last we saw them, we must have been trampled so flat that the breath of life would not have remained in us."

"But what does it all mean?" Darius asked,

watching the enemy, who was making straight for the easternmost end of the encampment, and wholly oblivious of the fact that the English troops were coming up to intercept them.

“Mean, lad? Why the Spaniards made a sally with the idee, most like, of cuttin’ our army in two, an’ it may be to destroy the store of provisions. That don’t concern us very nearly jest now, seein’ as the plan has been frustrated, but there’s like to be some hot work within the next hour, an’ it stands us in hand to be ready for it. Where are the muskets?”

The weapons, thrown on the bottom of the trench when the old soldier began with feverish haste to make the excavation, were covered by the sand to such depth that much time would be lost in trying to find them.

“We cannot stop to search for a needle in a haystack,” the sergeant said, after glancing around quickly, and failing to see that for which he sought. “I’ll guarantee there are twenty, further along in the trench. Now then, Nicholas, move lively, for we have a chance to save our lives, which is more than seemed possible ten minutes ago.”

The sergeant ran along the trench at full speed, and Nicholas followed as readily and swiftly as the most courageous lad could have done. It was pos-

sible now to see the enemy, and that blind and unreasoning terror no longer held sway over him.

By the time the sergeant and his three comrades were fully equipped once more, they were midway between the English and the Spanish army, the former coming directly toward them, and the latter moving obliquely as if to break the force of the blow which must speedily be dealt.

“Now then, up you go!” and the sergeant raised Robert by the foot, as if aiding him to mount a horse.

One after another the three lads emerged from the trench and stood waiting on the brink to aid the old soldier, who had no little difficulty in scrambling up the smooth side of the embankment.

Once they were on the same level the sergeant took command of his squad by shouting :—

“Now, lads, on at your best pace, and let us find some place in yonder line where we can give a good account of ourselves, for I am thinkin’ every musket King George can muster on this day will be needed !”

Then at full speed he ran to meet the advancing line of red, followed closely by the lads, and ere they gained the column the roar of heavy guns from the fortifications told that the Spaniards were ready to make of this sally a general engagement,

if it so pleased the English commander to set on his forces.

A cheer from the soldiers welcomed Sergeant Prout and the lads as they came up, and way was speedily made for them in the second rank, by the side of men who had gained experience in the art of warfare on many a hotly-contested field of battle.

They, the raw recruits from New York province, were marching shoulder to shoulder with the veterans of the 56th, and Nicholas Vallet held his head as high as the bravest among them, for his timorousness had been left behind in the trench where death had stood so near to him.

“It will be a general engagement,” he heard a man near him say confidently. “There go our siege guns, and you may be certain the men-of-war will not be idle when we are like to be hard pressed.”

The ships in the offing had already shown their willingness to engage, for those nearest the shore were already pitching heavy shot over the red-coated ranks into the Dons as they swarmed out of the fortifications, and even the artillery guarding the hospital enclosure barked a spiteful warning to the Spaniards.

King George’s men on both land and sea welcomed the battle as their only salvation, for all

knew full well that after a certain time, and perhaps that time might be measured by as many days as could be counted on one's fingers, all that brave force would have succumbed to the heat and the fever. If a general engagement was to be fought—if the siege was to be maintained, it was well the hot work came now, while the reinforcements from North America were comparatively strong.

And the commanders of the English forces were even more eager than their men to bring the matter to a hasty conclusion, for they knew far better than did the rank and file, how rapidly that vast army was melting away.

Therefore it was that within less than thirty minutes from the time the first Spaniard showed himself outside the sally-port, the two forces were engaged by land and sea, and the question as to which king should call the island his own must be speedily settled.

There was no longer opportunity for the four recruits from New Rochelle to follow the movements of the different forces on this field in front of Havana. The engagement was general, raging as fiercely at one point as at another, and it was only possible for a man to take note of what was going on directly around him.

Sergeant Prout's recruits had no more than got

into stride with the men of the 56th when the command to "charge" was given, and the three lads found themselves borne onward by their companions in one irresistible rush. It would have been impossible for either of them to have stepped out of the ranks just then, and, as Darius said breathlessly to Robert while they dashed forward without volition, "one fellow was as brave as another, so far as the enemy had any means of knowing."

Then ensued the shock as the two bodies of men came together; then arose that tumult of cries, cheers, groans and screams, sounding even above the thunder of the cannon, which roared in this quarter and in that until it seemed as if the machines of death entirely surrounded the field of battle.

Again did the three lads lose all consciousness of their actions. There was a dim idea in their minds that they were struggling to keep the places assigned them in the ranks; that they defended themselves against the thrusts of the foe, and dealt some blows in return. They were wholly ignorant of the fact that they fought in such manner as won the praise of the veterans around them—that they held their own by Sergeant Prout's side oftentimes against great odds, and more than once rallied at his call to defend the colors, when the foe, constantly reinforced, was near to capturing them.

Then Robert had a dim idea that the enemy wavered; he fancied his companions pressed forward, and he was conscious of running at full speed, uttering shouts of savage joy and triumph.

After that there was a lull—a breathing spell, when one might wipe away the sweat of battle and the blood of himself or his comrades, for each man in that remnant of the 56th which gathered at the seashore was covered with the ominous stains as if he had been working in the shambles.

As the three lads stood facing each other, with the sergeant overlooking them all, they learned what had been done while they were in that frenzied fever which accompanies the heat and turmoil when a battle becomes a hand-to-hand conflict.

The first column of Spaniards were entirely dispersed, and, as one of the men declared, no less than an hundred and fifty had been literally driven into the sea.

“They couldn’t stand the charge, an’ took death by drownin’ rather than meet it like men at the muzzles of our muskets.”

“How could we drown them?” Darius asked in bewilderment, and, gazing out over the water, he saw here and there, rising and falling on the swell, the bodies of human beings clad in Spanish uniforms.

“Once we started them runnin’ they got into such a panic that nothin’ could have stopped ’em. All we had left alive rushed into the sea as if there only could safety be found,” and the sergeant added as he gazed around him at the few of the 56th who were left alive, “It has been a big price to pay for such as are driftin’ out there!”

For a moment the boys believed the battle was over, and then they understood that the strife had ceased only in that portion of the field occupied by them. The gallant regiment had chased the enemy nearly a mile, to the very edge of the shore, and thus had gotten away from the line of fire.

Looking back from whence they came, the lads saw the two armies within less than five hundred yards of each other, while here and there, around the fortifications, were detachments fighting hand-to-hand for the possession of this or that point of vantage.

From seaward the English fleet poured a tempest of grape, cannister or heavy shot into the works, or ranks of the enemy. Seaward, Morro and Punta, enveloped in the smoke of their own guns, were raining missiles upon the British vessels, more than one of which had been forced to haul off for repairs, or beached to prevent her from sinking with all on board. In the inner harbor the Spanish fleet kept

up a constant and murderous fire upon the red-coated soldiery, and on every hand was death, human suffering and desolation.

It was a general engagement by both land and sea, and yet as the survivors of the 56th stood recuperating from the heat and shock of battle, it appeared much as if twenty distinct and separate actions were being carried on in as many parts of the field.

If the English had suffered elsewhere as severely as among these veterans of the 56th, then indeed was the siege likely to be raised for lack of men to continue it. As nearly as could be determined fully four hundred answered the hurried call to arms, and now less than half that number stood on the sea-shore worn and spent. The remainder lay stretched out on the field dead or dying—a long lane of lifeless bodies to mark the trail over which the chase had led.

It seemed strange to these lads from New Rochelle that they had come out of the conflict with not a scratch ; but Sergeant Prout, old campaigner as he was, did not trouble his head to speculate upon the matter.

“It’s enough for me if I’m able to keep on my feet,” he said grimly when Robert, shrinking from the terrible scenes around him, and particularly from

a view of those lifeless bodies seaward which the swell was swinging to and fro with a semblance of life, suggested that they ought to be truly thankful their lives had been spared. "Some are bound to come out of a battle alive, as others are certain to be killed, an' he who survives this day, may go under on the morrow. But the afternoon's work ain't done yet, an' I'm doubtful if sunset sees an end of it. The Spaniards won't give in whipped so quickly, an' I'm of the opinion that Albemarle will keep bangin' away until one side or the other is willin' to cry for quarter."

At this moment a mounted officer rode up with orders for the 56th to join the Duke of Richmond's regiment, which was engaged against overwhelming odds at a redoubt near to the castle walls, which had been captured by the English in the early part of the engagement.

In order to obey this command it was necessary to march over that portion of the field which appeared to be literally and continuously swept by grape and cannister from the fleet in the inner harbor, and as one gazed across it there appeared to be no possibility any living thing could pass that way.

Robert mentally shivered as the order was given to fall into line, and Nicholas' voice was shrill and tremulous as he cried out to the sergeant:—

“Do they expect we can go through that down-pour of iron?”

“It’s exactly where we are goin’, lad,” the old soldier replied in what he intended should be a cheery voice, but there was a look of something very like fear on his face as he spoke. “Remember that you have been in as hot a place, an’ yet come out with not so much as a hole in your coat. So it will be again, if ——”

Sergeant Prout did not conclude the sentence, for at that instant the command “forward” was given, and the shattered regiment, now hardly more than a good-sized squad, moved out into the storm of grape and cannister.

Soldiers fell from this rank and that; great gaps were cut in the lines, and officers were mowed down even as they ordered the men to “close up.” Now the column would move to the right or to the left in order to avoid passing over the writhing bodies of their comrades just fallen; but yet the advance was continued as steadily as though the command was on drill.

Both Robert and Darius so quaked with fear that only with greatest difficulty could they keep their places in the ranks, and for the moment there was no thought as to how Nicholas might be behaving. It was as though they marched side by side with

death—as if life was well-nigh spent, and there was no care in their minds whether others displayed courage or cowardice.

Sergeant Prout, however, had a very keen idea of the condition into which the lad had fallen, for he it was who kept the terror-stricken boy from falling headlong. Had it been possible, Nicholas would have fled ere yet the troops entered that zone of fire; but he was so prostrated by fear as to be literally incapable of movement. The hold which the old soldier retained upon his shoulders was all that kept him on his feet. He had no more command over his body than did those lifeless forms which the clangor of battle would never more arouse.

The awful march finally came to an end when a full fifth of all the men who had started from the shore were lying dead or wounded upon the blood-stained sand, and then was come the time that every effort was needed, for the Spaniards were rapidly gaining an advantage over their wearied foe.

The danger was increased rather than lessened, and yet Robert and Darius hailed the change of movement joyfully, because now they could struggle for life instead of remaining comparatively inactive while comrades were mowed down by scores.

Once more the excitement of the battle was upon

them, and they followed the example of the nearest companion, without well knowing what they did.

The redoubt was held, after a contest fierce and murderous had raged around it an hour or more, and when the shadows began to lengthen into night the four comrades found themselves behind the fortification burning with thirst, and bathed with moisture that had streamed from their own bodies.

Again, and in what seemed a most miraculous manner, had they been preserved from harm, while hundreds had yielded up their lives in this quarrel between kings.

“The battle must be ended by this time,” Robert said with a long-drawn sigh of horror as he gazed upon the field which appeared to be carpeted with the lifeless bodies of men over whom night was drawing a black mantle.

“Ended until mornin’, I’m thinkin’,” the sergeant replied in the tone of one nearly exhausted. “We’ve got the best of it, so far; but the Dons haven’t yet been whipped into surrender. I’d give all my chances of promotion for a drink of water this minute.”

It was unfortunate that he had thus given words to his wants, for straightway the boys were reminded that their mouths were parched, their tongues swollen, and every sense blunted by the one de-

sire to quench the terrible thirst which assailed them.

Nicholas, who had recovered sufficiently from the spasm of terror which seized upon him during that awful march across the field to take part in the defense of the redoubt, alone remained silent, and when Darius inquired if he did not suffer from thirst in common with the others, replied in a low tone :

“If I had done my part this day as you have, I might allow myself to complain because it seems as if my throat was cracked and bleeding ; but when I remember that I would have run away even after we had been honored by the permission to march with the 56th—that I showed myself meaner than ever before, it is as if by making no complaint I may atone for bringing shame upon you.”

“This is no time to dwell upon such things, lad,” Sergeant Prout said quickly. “None save us four know that you would have turned back when we were ordered across the field, an’ it wouldn’t have surprised me very greatly if all you raw recruits had beat a retreat just then. I’ve been in the king’s army these six years, an’ seen some places that I thought mighty hot ; but nothin’ in my experience ever came up to that march in the midst of the battle. Afraid ? I had to keep a tight clutch of

myself in order to hold my place in the ranks, an' I'm not certain it wasn't some relief to be obliged to lug you along."

The conversation was interrupted by a call for men to carry the wounded to the rear, and the old soldier forced his lads to answer it with him.

"It's somethin' that must be done, an' we've had none of it thus far, therefore we can't hold back. Shut your eyes to the sufferin' of the poor fellows, an' remember that all these wounds are necessary for the takin' of the city."

Perhaps it was not so much the idea of doing a full share of the painful work that prompted the sergeant to volunteer for the duty. He may have understood that while the boys were thus engaged they would think less of their own sufferings, and certain it was that the lack of water was causing more pain than had many of the bullets.

Until nearly midnight these four, each carrying a corner of the same litter, marched to and fro between the redoubt and the field hospitals, and during such time they had no opportunity either to quench their thirst or allay the pangs of hunger.

Once Captain Lispenard, meeting them while they were engaged in this mournful duty, proposed that they share with him a bottle of spirits which he had purchased from one of the general's servants;

but Sergeant Prout declined the invitation almost harshly.

“While I have command over these three recruits, captain, they will put into their stomachs no such invitation to the fever. Thirst won't kill quickly, an' 'twixt now an' mornin' we may find a sup of water. A single glass full of that which you offer in all kindness may do what the Spaniards' lead an' iron have failed of doin'.”

“You're right, sergeant, it is wisest not to touch the stuff; but almost anything seems better than this terrible thirst. Under whose command are you performing this duty?”

“We volunteered for it, sir. When the enemy made the sally we were caught up by the 56th, and have fought in their ranks since then. The regiment, or what's left of it, is now in yonder redoubt, nearly every inch of which I venture to say is bathed with English blood.”

“Then there is no reason why you should not join your own command. In fact, I order you to do so, and will detail some of our men who have been resting since sunset to relieve you. You four may seek repose wheresoever you please, with the understanding that you are to be with us before the morrow dawns.”

“If we have that permission, captain, we'll de-

vote a portion of the time to searchin' for water; I have an idee a supply may be found west of headquarters not more than a mile."

"Be careful not to stray outside the lines, although I don't fancy that would be an easy matter this night," and, thus speaking, the captain went toward the quarters of the New Rochelle company to send the detail which he had promised should relieve Sergeant Prout and his recruits.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BATTLE FOR WATER.

WHEN the four comrades were finally relieved from duty, that is to say within half an hour after they had spoken with Captain Lispenard, there was but one thought in the minds of all, and that regarding water.

After learning that they would soon be at liberty to go whithersoever they pleased, the lads had allowed themselves to realize how intense was the thirst which assailed them, and with the realization their sufferings were increased.

During the earlier part of the evening, when the lack of water was no more than an inconvenience, Sergeant Prout had shown them how the frontiersmen allay thirst, and each of the boys tried this plan of holding a bullet in his mouth. Then had come the time when the leaden weight dragging on the muscles of the jaws, failed to excite a flow of saliva, and the desire for liquid increased until it became a fever.

Instantly they were relieved from duty Darius

insisted that the old soldier lead them in search of what they so sadly needed.

“You told Captain Lispenard you believed water would be found a mile west of headquarters,” the lad said, speaking with difficulty because of the dryness of his mouth. “Let us waste no time, but seek it at once, for the pain of thirst is of a surety the keenest of sufferings.”

“There is no need you should tell me that, lad,” the sergeant replied in a tone of irritation. “My tongue is as nearly parched as yours, but this is not the first time in my life that I have been willin’ to give up all I possessed for a drink of water.”

Even as he spoke the old soldier had started off at a rapid pace in the direction where he believed they might find relief from their sufferings, and it was not necessary that he warn the lads to follow closely.

Darius walked by the sergeant’s side, and slightly in advance, as if to spur him on, while the other two in their eagerness almost overrun the leaders.

Nicholas Vallet had made but little complaint since the moment he and his companions were detailed to aid the wounded. He had performed his full share of the labor with never a word or sign of bodily fatigue, although he, in common with the others, was well-nigh exhausted before relief came;

but when it had been necessary to lift a grievously wounded man on to a stretcher, the timorous lad hung back with eyes averted. It appeared to his comrades much as if he feared to look upon the work of the bullet or the sword lest he again be seized by panic of terror, and Sergeant Prout mentally gave him full credit for performing his duty so well under the circumstances.

Save for their intense thirst these four comrades would have been so nearly exhausted by the excitement, the heat of battle, and the fatigue consequent upon performing ambulance duties, as to be absolutely unable to make further exertion ; but now all the weariness of body was overshadowed by that one craving, and they pressed forward like men fresh on the trail.

Before a quarter of the distance had been traversed they overtook a squad of five marching in the same direction, and after Sergeant Prout asked whither they were going, he learned that others beside himself had taken note of the spring toward which he was journeying.

Fifty yards further on another squad of English were overtaken, and the old soldier said grumblingly, but in a low tone lest it should be overheard by those who were probably suffering as much from thirst as himself.

“We are not like to do ourselves an injury by drinkin’ too much water. At this rate there will be two men to every pint the spring contains, even if none others have been ahead of us.”

“We can yet walk a little faster, and arrive there first,” Darius suggested, at the same time quickening his pace; but those who had been overtaken were not minded to be deprived of their full share of the precious liquid, and all pressed forward at the best speed which weary soldiers could maintain.

The sergeant had noted well the location of that little hollow in the sand where the water oozed up slowly from the reservoir beneath, and went toward it as straight as an arrow is sent from the bow, at least, so it seemed when he recognized in the gloom some distance ahead, a palm which served him as a landmark.

“There is where we shall find what we are needin’, lads, if it so be others have not too lately visited the place!” he exclaimed triumphantly, and at the sound of his voice all that thirsty squad broke into a run, beginning to enjoy in anticipation the refreshing draughts which would quench their burning thirst.

A moment later the eager men halted suddenly as if at the word of command, for in the gloom of the night there had sprung up from around the tiny

pool of water, twelve, fifteen, mayhap twenty dusky forms, and the sergeant gave vent to an exclamation of mingled disappointment and anger, for he knew beyond a peradventure that the scanty supply must already have been exhausted.

One of the Englishmen cried out, demanding that those who were first at the spring should respect the necessities of others and moderate their desires.

In a defiant tone came the reply in Spanish, and those whose anticipations had outstripped their feet understood that the life-giving pool was in the possession of the enemy.

Perhaps half this squad of Englishmen still retained their muskets, while others of the party, like Sergeant Prout and his recruits, had thrown aside their weapons in order to succor the wounded; but those who were armed and those who were unarmed became animated by the same thought, the same desire, and as one man they rushed forward, not bent on the quarrel of kings, but maddened by their own sufferings.

When the coming of night had forced the combatants to cease their work of killing, a portion of the Spanish army yet remained outside the fortifications, and thus this tiny spring of water had been left midway between the opposing lines; but so far west-

ward from the center that until now it had not been disturbed by the combatants.

It was a priceless supply, however small, and would be held by that force which should prove the stronger.

The frenzy of the English was no greater than the necessities of the Spaniards, and instead of recoiling before the rush of thirsty men, the soldiers of King Charles held their ground—ay, even advanced, lest during the combat which it seemed certain must follow, the little pool should be fouled.

There was neither parley nor hesitation. English and Spanish were equally determined to gain possession of this life-giving supply, and in the merest fraction of time after the two parties were aware of each other's presence, the most desperate conflict was begun.

In the darkness, and at such close quarters, it was impossible to use firearms without the danger of inflicting as much damage upon friend as foe, and the battle was begun and continued with only such weapons as nature had provided.

Robert saw Nicholas leap forward full at the throat of a Spaniard who was on the point of raising his musket as a club, and then he himself was confronted by a foe who thirsted to take his life.

In a twinkling, as it were, every man had his

adversary, and back and forth, first toward this line of battle and then toward the other, swept the combatants in a dense group, for neither English nor Spaniard dared move far from his fellows lest he be driven too near the enemy's lines.

And no one could give, even within a short time after the combat was ended, any details of what had been done during that struggle in the night.

All alike were frenzied by the desire for water, and even as they fought for the mastery there was in the minds of each the idea, not that he was battling against a Spaniard or an Englishman, but that he was putting forth every energy, exerting every muscle to win that draught, which at the moment was the only thing in all the world he needed.

The combat may have been ended in ten minutes, or prolonged for an hour—no one could say. Robert only knew that he grappled with one of the foe, pinioning the man's arms to prevent him from drawing a knife, and that this form of contest continued until all was a blank.

Darius and the sergeant fought side by side, holding the enemy at arm's length, and dealing blows with fists or whatsoever came within their reach that could be used as clubs, until they sank exhausted.

As for Nicholas, he was more like some savage beast than a human being; springing at his adversary he clutched him by the throat with a grip that only relaxed when the Spaniard ceased resistance—choked into the insensibility of death, and from one to another, so it was said, did the lad leap like a cat, all the while uttering howls of rage not unlike to that animal.

And as it was impossible for the combatants to say how long this struggle lasted, so would it have been impossible for them to have explained why it came to an end.

All engaged in it had borne the heat of the day and the fatigue of the night until nature rebelled against the strain put upon her, and it is more reasonable to suppose that one after another, Spaniard and Englishman alike, sank down upon the hot sand which the dews of the night had not yet cooled, exhausted and unconscious, rather than that either side gained a victory.

It was not yet dawn when Robert became conscious. That he was alive and suffering, suffering with that terrible thirst which had increased from pain to positive agony, was all he knew. Then his next sensations were as if his tongue had swollen until it was the largest member of his body. After this came the burning in his throat, followed by

an almost insane craving for water, and then he understood where he was—what had occurred to prevent him from gratifying his most intense desire.

Raising himself on one elbow he saw, lying here and there about him, dark forms which may have been friends, and possibly were enemies; but nowhere could he see that tiny pool which represented life amid the scenes of death.

He understood all that had happened, and yet it was as if some other than himself had taken part in the combat. He realized that his comrades must be near about, and feared that one or all of them might be dead; yet it seemed little concern of his.

While he was gazing around and yet seeing objects but indistinctly, he heard a sharp cry of anguish, saw a form near him rise up to a sitting posture, struggle to its knees, and in an instant later pitch face downward upon the sand.

Twenty times, perhaps forty, during the few days he had been on this island of Cuba had Robert Clement seen strong men fall in the sudden agony of that terrible fever to which no one had given a name, and he knew full well, even while he himself was suffering so keenly as to blind all his sensibilities, that this victim had been seized with the fearsome malady after having passed through the battle of the day and the combat of the night.

He said to himself, hardly comprehending the meaning of the words, that this man most likely was dying, and just then there was less fear of death in Robert Clement's mind than ever before.

Sitting upright he gazed at the writhing form until there came to his mind the idea that he personally was concerned in this last display of the fever's malignity, although at the moment he could not have said how or why.

Then he staggered toward the sufferer; not with the thought that he might give relief, but because he was impelled so to do, and when he gained a glimpse of the face which even now was distorted, it was as if his own sufferings vanished—as if he realized keenly and fully as never before since the close of the day's battle, all the outlines of the situation.

It was Nicholas Vallet who had succumbed to the dread malady, and, although knowing it was hopeless to dream of giving him aid, Robert made his way here and there among the recumbent forms, seeking Sergeant Prout.

After what seemed to him like a long, weary time of searching he found the old soldier lying face downward upon the sand, and as he turned him over with feverish haste, the sergeant muttered threatening words.

“Get up! Get up, for you are needed!” the lad

cried shrilly in the old soldier's ear. "Nicholas has been seized with the fever, and is dying!"

The sergeant made one unsuccessful effort to stagger to his feet as he muttered indistinctly, because of his swollen tongue :—

"I had thought I myself was dying ; but that good fortune was not mine."

"Nicholas has the fever, sergeant ! The fever !" Robert screamed, shaking the old man with all his feeble strength.

"Ay, the fever, and it is water he needs, even as do we. Did we hold the spring, lads ?"

"I cannot see it hereabout. Mayhap we mistook the location."

The sergeant arose and shook himself like one who would throw off the heaviness of slumber, and then he was once more a frontiersman, keenly on the alert for every possibility of prolonging life even when all hope seemed to have vanished.

"It is water we need, lad, and if these men, have like me, fought until they fell senseless, then through their death may we live, for the supply would have been exhausted before a tenth part of us had quenched our thirst ! Come, let us seek the spring !" and now the old man spoke quickly, nervously, like one who had but a single thought, and forgets all else beside.

He went here and there as if following a trail by the scent, now staggering, now walking steadily, and again breaking into a run, doubling, moving forward and back, until a cry that was more like the snarl of a brute than the voice of a man told Robert the search had been successful.

The lad saw Sergeant Prout throw himself down upon the sand, and it seemed as if he buried his face during fully a moment, after which he rose up, the drops of precious liquid falling from his beard as he said in a tone of most fervent thanksgiving : —

“ God be praised, lad ! God be praised ! Now do you take so much as shall suffice to moisten your throat and tongue, havin’ good care not to drink too much, while I seek out Darius. It is as if the Lord had ordered that all these men should fight until it was no longer possible for them to reach the spring, that we four might live ! ”

“ Nicholas is dying ! ” Robert said huskily as he ran swiftly forward, and then it was to him as if he had never before known such pleasure, such gratification, as came with that draught of cooling, life-giving water.

“ Careful, lad ! Careful ! ” Sergeant Prout said warningly as he came toward the spring, half carrying Darius. “ Too much now will be worse than not enough. Be sparin’ lest you invite the fever. ”

Reluctantly Robert made way for Darius, who, when the scent of the water was in his nostrils flung himself forward, and drank, and drank, and drank until the old soldier was forced to exert all his strength to pull the lad away.

Again and again did these three return to the spring until they were so far refreshed that the agony of their thirst was no more than a memory, and then they sought their fever-stricken comrade.

He lay as he had fallen, his tongue swollen and extended from his mouth until it no longer had the semblance of that portion of the human body ; his face was distorted and of a livid sallowness which robbed the features of all familiar look—only from the clothing could he have been recognized as that lad who had alternately shown bravery and cowardice without knowing why he was possessed of either.

“Is it the fever?” Robert asked anxiously as the sergeant bent over the unconscious boy.

“I fear so, lad, although it may be the effect of thirst upon him. I have seen men take on strange looks when dyin’ from lack of water.”

“Let us get him to the spring as soon as may be, for, should the others become conscious, and they are as like to do so as we were, his chances for relief might be lost.”

“An’ yet I know not whether we shall benefit or kill the lad by allowin’ him to drink. If it be the fever, I am told water should be kept far from him.”

“And if it indeed be the fever, then must he die, and we shall not have hastened death by giving him a drink,” Darius said impatiently as he lifted the unconscious lad in his arms, bearing him to that depression in the sand where they three had found such wondrous gratification and relief.

Nicholas no longer had the power to drink, and seeing this Robert gathered water in his hand, pouring it either side the swollen tongue until that member was so much reduced that it no longer protruded from between the lips.

“He should be taken to one of the hospital tents,” Robert suggested after a time, and Sergeant Prout replied decidedly :—

“Then he would die beyond a peradventure, for there are not nurses enough to care for the half of those who are on the sick list. This lad saved my life, an’ if it so be his can be saved through efforts of mine, it shall be done.”

“What can we do to help him?” Darius asked wonderingly.

“That I know not, lad; but this much is certain. With such assistance as we three can give he will

be better cared for than if we left him among the thousands who are sufferin' from lack of the rudest nursing. Let us carry him to that highest part of the plain in the rear of the encampment, an' there, where he will not disturb others, put up a shelter of our own. By standin' watch and watch with him each of us three will be on duty but eight hours out of the twenty-four, an' so much of our time we surely should give a comrade who needs it."

This was the one thing above all others which Robert would have done, and Darius was not averse to extending a helping hand when it was so sorely needed.

"I will take the lad in my arms and carry him in the rear of where the New Rochelle company is stationed, to that point marked by a clump of palms, where we searched this mornin' for signs of moisture. Meanwhile do you two look about for something in which water may be carried—seize upon whatsoever vessels you can find, an' havin' filled them, follow me."

"But what about these poor fellows who are lying here so near death?" Robert asked.

"If it be possible, without too much loss of time, after you have got your supply of water, arouse them; but bear in mind, lads, that now is each man fightin' for his own life, an' while we may take it

upon ourselves to help each other, we shall go under if we extend our charities. But I'll not preach such doctrine to you, boys, who haven't been hardened to the like. Do as seems best, keepin' well before you the fact that you may be sacrificin' Nicholas' life by loiterin' here to aid strangers even though they wear the English uniform."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AMATEUR NURSES.

SERGEANT PROUT, raising Nicholas Vallet in his arms, much as if the latter had been only an infant, strode away into the darkness, leaving Robert and Darius to act as their consciences should dictate.

It was not possible for them to make any move toward aiding the apparently helpless ones until after fully a quarter of an hour had elapsed, unless they had been willing to arouse the late combatants before a supply of water was secured for themselves, in which last case there would be no hope they could carry any away.

There were no less than thirty men lying in the vicinity of the tiny basin in the sand which had been drained by the three comrades, and there was every probability the thirsty ones, regardless of nationality, would renew the combat on returning to consciousness.

“It appeared to me that Sergeant Prout intended for us to understand he was not in favor of trying

to aid the other unfortunates," Robert said as he and Darius hastened away in search of a vessel in which a supply of the precious liquid could be carried.

"He surely reminded us that charity should begin at home," Darius said thoughtfully.

"It seems wicked to steal away, leaving those poor fellows to die, when we might be the means of saving their lives."

"To aid them would be to sacrifice Nicholas, for you know full well, Robert Clement, that once no more than ten of them, whether English or Spanish, were on their feet, we could not hope to get water for several hours. We three drank all that was in the basin, and much time may perhaps be required before it is filled again."

"Yet are we to leave them to death? Do you not think we should arouse them after having filled such vessels as we may find?"

"To what end? Once they are awake to their sufferings, the fight will be continued."

Robert remained silent several moments, during which time both continued on at their best pace toward the encampment, and then he said slowly, much as if speaking to himself:

"I'm not certain but that it would be a kindly act if we aroused them that they might fight, for

death in a combat is far more pleasant than to go out of the world suffering such agonies as were ours while the desire for water was upon us."

"You shall do as seems best, Robert Clement. As for me, I will follow the sergeant's advice."

"But he gave none."

"I think he spoke plainly enough."

By this time the lads had come to the first line of tents, and, regardless of personal rights, they began overhauling the camps in search of vessels in which to carry water. Surely it was not theft to take such articles as might be necessary for the saving of a human life.

With two small cans and a pannikin the lads returned at the best pace of which they were capable, but, owing to extreme fatigue, this was not rapid.

The condition of affairs remained much as when they left the pool. None of the late combatants had returned to consciousness, and more than one figure lay so rigid that it was positive death had again visited the place.

The water was slowly welling up through the sand; but not more than a single pint had already accumulated, and however much Robert wished to aid the sufferers, he could not in justice to his comrades do so as yet.

Fully half an hour was spent in filling the vessels they had brought, and even then the supply was no more than two quarts.

“At last!” Darius said with a sigh of relief as he raised the two cans. “There is not a drop left, and it will be fifteen or twenty minutes before enough has gathered to satisfy the thirst of one man. You shall carry the pannikin, Robert, and I leave it to you to decide whether you will try to help those poor fellows.”

“I’ll arouse two, and they shall say what is to be done,” and Robert went toward the nearest figure.

“Wait!” Darius cried in alarm. “Wait until we have carried our supply out of sight!”

“To what end?”

“Can’t you understand that we should be robbed? Suppose you and I, while our desire was so overpowering, had come upon two unarmed lads with a supply of what we needed? Think you we would have allowed them to go away in peace? There would have been no thought or care for comrades of theirs—we should have quenched our own thirst.”

Without a word Robert raised the pannikin and walked slowly in the direction taken by Sergeant Prout. He knew Darius had spoken only the truth, and it was more important Nicholas be saved than that a stranger be relieved.

“It is hard, and seems wicked to do as we are doing,” he said in a low tone when they were some distance from the exhausted pool.

“We can give comfort to but one, and surely it is right that we choose to aid a comrade.”

Stoutly as Darius spoke, he was far from feeling easy in his mind about leaving the poor fellows to their fate; but he understood, as did Robert now, that they were bound to give relief first to their own. It was a direct application of the command that “charity should begin at home.”

The lads had no difficulty in finding Sergeant Prout. He was on the high land half a mile or more in the rear, and nearer the seashore, of the New Rochelle encampment.

Already had he erected such a shelter as would protect Nicholas from the heavy dew, and was sitting with the lad’s head on his arm when Robert and Darius came up.

“No, he hasn’t any idea of himself yet; but I can’t say that’s a bad sign,” the old soldier replied to Robert’s question.

“Has he really got the fever?”

“I think not, lad. It has to me more the appearance of a general collapse, brought about by the excitement, hard work, heat an’ lack of water. I’m hopin’ he’ll pull through all right if we can give

him the right kind of nursin'. I've seen a good bit of this sort of thing, an' count on tryin' a plan of my own, if it so be Captain Lispenard will give his permission for us to be absent from headquarters. Take the poor fellow in your arms, Robert, an' I'll go to camp a spell."

Nicholas gave no sign of consciousness when he was passed from the sergeant's arm to Robert's, and the latter asked as the old man was walking away—

"Would it be right to give him water, if by chance he asks for any?"

"We'll take the chances, lad. Deal it out sparingly, but let him have enough to quench his thirst."

Then the sergeant was lost to view in the darkness, and the boys were left alone with their apparently unconscious comrade.

The supply of water had been carefully stored beneath the apology for a camp, and although either of the nurses could have swallowed the entire amount without being aware of having drunk too much, neither of them ventured even to glance toward it lest thirst should be excited.

Half an hour passed in silence. In front of them was the sea, dotted here and there with the riding lights of the fleet; toward the east was the encamp-

ment, and, further on, the besieged city; west of them the line of sentinels that marked the outermost posts of the invading army.

There was less than the usual amount of firing on this night: it was much as if a truce had been agreed upon, for only at long intervals could be heard the report of either cannon or musket.

Neither Robert nor Darius had spoken since the sergeant left them; they had their eyes fixed upon the lad who could be so brave and yet so cowardly, fearing each moment lest death should step between him and them.

Suddenly they were startled by seeing an uncouth figure emerge from the gloom close at hand, and Darius sprang to his feet in alarm, while Robert was forced to remain motionless because of Nicholas' head, which lay upon his arm.

"I kinder reckoned you lads would fall asleep before I could get here," a familiar voice cried cheerily, and all fear fled, for it was the sergeant who spoke.

He carried a heavy burden on his shoulder, and this it was which had given him such an odd appearance.

"I allow we can fix up a little hospital all by ourselves," he said, throwing on the ground a bundle of poles and canvas. "The captain not only gave

us permission to stay here, but allowed me to lug this tent away as well. It was a kindly act in him, for he has no right to give us such privileges, an' may be hauled over the coals for so doin'. I've agreed to report in camp every two hours durin' the day, an' if anything happens in the meantime I reckon we'll get an inklin' of it."

Then he bent over to look at Nicholas, and as he did so the lad opened his eyes.

"Did we get the water?" he asked feebly, and a cry of joy escaped from the sergeant's lips at this evidence that the boy was in his right mind.

"Ay, lad, we got some; but you haven't had your full share yet."

Darius came up with one of the cans, and this the old soldier held to the invalid's lips until the lad had drank fully half the contents.

"I reckon that'll be about what you're needin' just now," and the sergeant lowered the can. "You shall have more after a spell; but it's dangerous to take any very great amount at one time."

Refreshed by the draught, Nicholas would have arisen to his feet, not realizing he had been ill, but Robert prevented him.

"You've had a bad turn, and must lay still a while."

“Yes, lad,” Sergeant Prout said cheerily, “we’re usin’ you to start a hospital with, an’ you mustn’t disappoint us.”

Nicholas made no reply, but looked around questioningly, and, fearing lest he should grow alarmed regarding himself, the old soldier gave him a truthful account of all that had taken place, concluding by saying:—

“I’ve had some experience on this ’ere island, an’ count on doctorin’ you three lads accordin’ to my own ideas. We’ll camp here so long as permission be given, an’ I’ll go bail that the four of us will pull through in proper shape, so far as the fever is concerned.”

Then calling upon Darius for assistance, Sergeant Prout set up the tent, and less than five minutes afterward the four comrades were inside sleeping soundly.

When morning came the old soldier, without awakening his comrades, and after noting the pleasing fact that Nicholas was apparently enjoying a refreshing sleep, left the tent and reported to Captain Lispenard according to agreement.

It may have been two hours later when Robert opened his eyes and saw the sergeant preparing a most appetizing meal.

“Yes, I’ve been to camp, an’ got there just in

time to receive our share of the good things that were goin'. Besides all that I've heard what may sound to you like good news. We're not like to be called upon to do any more fightin' for a week or more, unless it so be the Spaniards make a sudden move."

"But I thought the battle of yesterday hadn't been ended!" Darius cried in surprise.

"Neither has it; but we shan't settle it yet a while because the Dons have sneaked back into the city under cover of darkness, havin' most likely got all they wanted of English sport. Morro Castle is to be stormed next, an' from what Captain Lispenard can learn, we shan't be in it."

"Why not?" Darius asked, as if grievously disappointed.

"Because some of the force must stay here in case another sally is made from the city, an' it is about decided that we of New York will have the job. Now you see, lads, there's nothin' for us to do save get into good shape again, an' we'll pull through if the Spaniards will only come out now an' then to prevent us from growin' rusty. How are you feelin', Nicholas?"

"There is nothing the matter with me, sergeant, except that I feel tired an' lazy."

"You're like to for quite a spell yet; you've had

a narrow squeak, lad, an' are bound to take precious good care of yourself."

During the three succeeding days Sergeant Prout's recruits had absolutely nothing to do save care for themselves, and this task they attended to with such purpose that at the end of the time they were in reasonably good condition, as compared with the majority of the men around them.

The sergeant had forced them to eat and drink sparingly; to observe the most rigorous habits of cleanliness, and remain sheltered from the direct rays of the sun as much as possible. When supplies of fruit had been brought into camp from the surrounding country, the lads bartered their share for meal or flour, instead of eating so much as a single banana, and the wine dealt out at certain intervals was exchanged by these four for water.

Perhaps these precautions were needless; it is possible they would have retained their semblance of health if the rules had been less rigid; but the old soldier did not believe such to be the case. He was firmly convinced that the condition of his recruits was due wholly to his system, and each day he drew the lines more closely, until Darius laughingly declared that very shortly he would insist on their "eating shadows and drinking dew lest their stomachs should be overloaded."

After the third day the lads were called upon to do their share of work in the trenches; but it so chanced they were never stationed so near the city as on that first occasion when death by suffocation had so nearly overtaken them.

There had been no abatement of the horrors of the siege; but, on the contrary, the terrible condition of affairs in camp increased, until the most sanguine among the soldiers understood that the king's army was wasting away so rapidly it would soon be necessary to beat a retreat, or effect some compromise with the enemy.

The sight of men falling under the heat of the sun, or suddenly smitten with the fever, did not affect the boys in such a degree as at first, because they were "becoming hardened" to it, as Sergeant Prout declared. It was impossible to walk through the encampment for a distance of a hundred yards, or traverse one of the trenches, without witnessing some terrible sight, and their situation would have been most pitiable had they not grown in a certain sense accustomed to the approach of death in every form.

They had what Sergeant Prout called "a taste of the dulness of a siege," until that day arrived when the English forces stormed Morro Castle, and then once more the lads saw the slaughter of human beings,

and looked upon it as something far less terrible than what might be witnessed during every hour of the day in the English encampment.

When it was rumored that the Castle would be stormed on the morrow, every man who could do a soldier's duty begged for permission to join the attacking party. Anything was preferable to remaining inactive while disease was mowing down victims so rapidly.

"I had never thought I'd be glad to go into a battle," Robert said as he sat with his comrades in the tent which yet remained alone on the heights; "but now I'm hoping we'll be counted among those who are to make the attack."

"It's little wonder you're eager," the sergeant said moodily. "I'd give my share of the plunder, in case the city is captured, to be in the foremost rank; but there's no such good fortune. Two hundred from New York have already been told off, an' the New Rochelle recruits are not among the number."

"Think you the castle can be taken?" Nicholas asked, and even though he had been frightened by the thought of a battle, his comrades could not have told it from his face; it was no longer possible for any of them to turn pale, because they, in common with all the troops, were ghostly in their pallidness.

"If we of the English army weren't in such des-

perate circumstances, I'd say there was a doubt of our bein' able to overrun that fortification," Sergeant Prout replied, speaking slowly like one who weighs well his words. "No man who wears King George's uniform is holdin' his life to be very precious just now, an' there are hundreds who'd welcome death by a bullet; therefore I'm countin' on our men fightin' as they never fought before—we shall have the castle, however long it may take to get it."

In this the sergeant was correct, as the lads well knew. They had heard several of the soldiers wish for an action in which they might be killed, so great was the pain of living, and it was whispered that in the hospitals many had taken their own lives rather than endure the misery and suffering which must otherwise precede death.

Therefore it was that on the morning when the castle was to be stormed the entire encampment was astir as soon the day had broke, and those who were to remain behind cast envious glances upon the men drawn up in line. Robert heard one soldier offer an acquaintance in the ranks all the wages that might be due him on the return of the regiment to New York, if he would exchange places during the engagement.

More than one veteran begged the commanding

officer of each regiment in turn, for permission to follow in any capacity; and, failing in gaining the desired boon, threatened to go into the action independently.

It was as if each man strove to run a race, the goal whereof was death.

Then the force detailed to remain on guard against a sally from the city was ordered to hold back the desperate ones who courted a speedy end to their sufferings, and among these last was none other than Captain Lispenard. He was wasted by disease until hardly more than a skeleton, and it seemed impossible he could muster sufficient strength to endure the march of two miles, yet did the man plead most piteously with Sergeant Prout to allow him passage through the lines.

The old soldier and his three recruits were on duty at that portion of the encampment which lay nearest the castle, and the captain at first attempted to make his way past them by virtue of authority as their commander.

“It can't be done, captain,” Sergeant Prout said, respectfully but firmly, even going so far as to present his bayonet to the officer's breast.

“But this is mutiny,” the captain cried angrily. “Do you deny my authority to command you?”

“By no means, sir; but you know full well that

our orders come from one higher in rank than you, and we have no choice save to obey.”

The captain drew his sword, raising it as if to strike, and Robert was on the point of leaving his place in the line to aid the old man, when the half-crazed officer fell to the ground with all the symptoms of that dread fever which already had claimed so many victims.

“I knew his mind was well-nigh gone, else he would not have so far forgotten the lessons he learned under Israel Putnam,” the sergeant muttered as he stooped to lift the fallen man’s head. “Here, lads,” he added, raising his voice, “I shall take it upon myself to detail you for other duty. Get the captain to our tent, an’ there care for him as best you may till I can join you.”

The recruits from New Rochelle had had ample experience in such work as was required of them, and, hastily forming a litter of the first blanket which could be come at, with two poles to support the sides, they bore the apparently lifeless man away just as the guns from the fleet told that the storming of the Castle had been commenced.

Save to lay him in the shade and moisten his blackened lips from time to time with water, there was nothing the lads could do to aid their stricken commander, and knowing full well that his com-

rades were as eager as himself to witness the action, Robert suggested :

“There is no reason why all three should remain here when one cannot find enough with which to occupy himself. Darius, you and Nicholas shall go out on the heights to view the battle, and after a while either you or he can come back to spell me.”

“We were ordered to stay here,” Nicholas said hesitatingly, for by this time he had come to a full understanding of the necessity for obedience.

“In such a case the sergeant cannot well find fault with us. I will take it upon myself to say that you shall go.”

By this time rapid and heavy reports told that the engagement was well under way, and after one hasty glance at the distorted face of the unconscious captain, Darius ran swiftly out of the tent, Nicholas following close upon his heels.

CHAPTER XIX.

STORMING THE CASTLE.

THE work of the day was already begun when Darius and Nicholas had gained a position on the heights from which a good view of Morro Castle could be had.

The English fleet was closing in on the point in a half circle, firing rapidly as they advanced, and the enemy was by no means backward in making reply.

From all the fortifications, and from the ships in the inner harbor, came flashes of fire, puffs of wool-like smoke, while overhead it was as if the missiles were so plentiful that each one must necessarily intercept the flight of another.

As when Admiral Pocock bombarded the Morro, every piece of ordnance afloat and in the fortifications was in action, and over all hung the heavy clouds of smoke, but without shutting out the view of everything, as before. A strong wind from the west and south forced the sulphurous vapor back

over the land, at times clearing it so nearly away that the spectators had good opportunity of witnessing everything which was being done.

Darius and Nicholas saw the English soldiers advance toward Morro on the double-quick, as if eager to be engaged in deadly strife; and, even though the distance was so great, it was possible to see gaps cut here and there in the unwavering lines, telling that some of the brave fellows need no longer fear an attack by the black death.

Then the clouds of smoke would shut out everything from view, and the lads literally held their breath until it was possible to gain a glimpse once more of their comrades, who had continued steadily onward despite the deadly rain of iron from the forts and Spanish vessels.

All this time the roar of cannon was incessant, and of such volume that to hold converse was out of the question. One had need to speak in a voice of thunder in order to make himself heard amid such a tempest of noise.

It was the same scene repeated again and again, after the English ships had once taken up their stations, whenever the blanket of smoke was rolled away by the wind.

Seaward, the circle of ships vomiting flame and missile landward, from where the Spanish fleet lay,

a fog-like bank of smoke out of which came a constant stream of shot; on the point, with Morro Castle as the pivot, a moving picture of men with glistening arms, now advancing, again falling back, but always facing those frowning ramparts behind which crouched the foe.

It was hardly a scene of warfare to these two boys who were so far distant that the horrible accompaniment of groans, screams and moaning of the dying could not be heard. Rather was it some such picture as they had witnessed at "Mr. Holt's Long Room" in New York city, save that here they knew the fate of all around them depended upon the result.

They forgot that death in varied forms lurked everywhere; forgot the captain over whom their comrade was watching; forgot all save that the events of the day would settle the fate of the city.

There was in their minds no thought as to the passage of time, no heed of anything save that smoke-enshrouded fort in the distance, until suddenly the fire of the English fleet was slackened, and one by one the ships drew off, each giving evidence, by splintered spar or swaying cordage, of the damage she had sustained.

"We are beaten!" Nicholas said, speaking faintly, and by the movement of his lips rather than the

sound which came from them, Darius understood what his companion had said.

There could be no question but that King George's vessels had sustained severe injury without being able to inflict any of moment ; but not until the last crippled ship had withdrawn beyond range of the enemy's guns would Darius believe that such really was the fact.

Then Sergeant Prout joined them, and, to the surprise of both the lads, he was far from appearing despondent.

The roar of the heavy guns had so far slackened that it was possible to make one's voice heard, by shouting, and Darius cried mournfully :—

“ We are beaten, sergeant, and now it is only a question of how soon the fever will kill us ? ”

“ Why have you lost heart, lad ! ” the old soldier replied in surprise. “ Is it in your mind that the day is lost because our fleet has hauled off ? ”

“ How else can it be ? ” Nicholas cried in a tearful tone. “ Without ships we cannot hope to take the fort.”

“ In that I am not willin' to agree with you, lad. Look yonder,” and the sergeant pointed toward Morro as the smoke of battle was rolling landward, where could be seen line after line of red marching steadily toward the fortification, as if having met

neither check nor discouragement. "Think you those brave men, and there be many from our province among them, will allow the Dons to hold them back?"

Darius was on the point of making some reply to this question when from the sally-port of the castle came what seemed to be a resistless tide of men such as the boys had already seen pour out from the fortifications round about the city, and the sergeant shouted triumphantly:—

"Now we've got 'em! Now we've got 'em! They're venturin' on a sally, an' surely the last they made should have been enough to convince the Spaniards their strength don't lay in that style of fightin'. Beaten, lads? Now has come the time when Morro is the same as ours, an' once that fort has been captured the city must speedily fall."

It was impossible for the spectators on the heights to distinguish very much of what was being done at such a distance. So far as they could see it was a rush and a scramble of men, the entire mass swaying now this way and then that, in apparent confusion; but Sergeant Prout claimed to be able to make out with reasonable distinctness the pleasing fact that the English troops were holding their own, if no more.

After a time, and no one of the three spectators

could say how many moments had passed, the throng of combatants divided into three divisions, one portion surging toward the sea-coast, another landward, and the third approaching the castle.

“The day is won!” Sergeant Prout shouted again and again, waving his arms, dancing to and fro, and in every way acting like one who has suddenly taken leave of his senses.

Darius and Nicholas, ready to believe what the old soldier had said because it was in accordance with their wishes, tried in vain during several moments to assure themselves that the battle had been won by King George’s men.

“Can’t you make out that the Spaniards are lead-in’ in that flight, lads? Isn’t it possible for you to see our men in close pursuit? And there——!”

A mighty shout of triumph went up all over the English encampment at this instant, as the Spanish flag was lowered, and then cry after cry of joy was heard from every quarter, for the English flag was hoisted above the castle walls.

The invading army had been nearly conquered by sickness; their fleet was driven off with many a wound and splintered spar, but yet the victory was won—won mainly by those raw recruits who had come in obedience to the call of their king from the province of North America.

Not until this moment of rejoicing did Nicholas bethink himself of Robert, and, without giving intimation of his purpose to the sergeant or Darius, he ran at full speed toward that solitary tent on the heights where the recruit from New Rochelle was doing all a lad might to save the life of his captain.

“We have taken Morro Castle!” Nicholas shouted even as he pulled aside the flap of the tent, and then the words of triumph died away on his lips. Robert, holding Captain Lispenard’s arms in the effort to prevent the fever-frenzied man from rushing into the open air, was struggling even as desperately as he had struggled against the Spaniards, to restrain the invalid from doing himself bodily injury.

“Where is the sergeant?” he cried pantingly, as if his breath was nearly exhausted.

“Half a mile away with Darius.”

“Call him quickly. The captain is delirious with fever, and I have fought so long to prevent him from rushing down to the sea, as he declares is his purpose, that my strength is nearly gone.”

“Then it were best I took your place,” Nicholas replied quickly, with a look on his face which told that he reproached himself for having so long forgotten what should have been constantly in his mind. “I can hold him for a time, and do you run straight

out on the headland until you find the sergeant and Darius."

As he spoke the lad had seized the unconscious officer in such a manner as prevented him from struggling more, and Robert hastened out to summon his comrades.

Not until another morning had dawned did Sergeant Prout and his recruits give much heed to what was being done by King George's forces, for during the remainder of the day on which Morro was stormed and captured, throughout all the coming night, and until the sun rose again, were they battling against the fever that had fastened upon Captain Lispenard, on the lines of conduct in such cases as laid down by the old soldier.

The officer had remained in a delirium all this time, and the paroxysm of the disease did not spend itself until the new day had come.

Twice during this time had one or the other of the boys gone to the hospitals, for such remedies as Sergent Prout believed were needed; but on neither occasion had the messengers asked concerning the fortunes of the day.

It was the saving of Anthony Lispenard's life which engrossed their entire attention, and the capture of Havana was to them as if it had never been attempted.

The shouts of triumph, and the booming of the guns from Morro when they were turned upon the doomed city, were unheeded by these four who had so suddenly forgotten their duties as soldiers, nor were they reminded of these latter until in the early morning, when came a visitor whom Sergeant Prout saluted with even more than his usual stiffness and respect, as he darkened the entrance of the tent.

The boys knew it was Lieutenant-colonel Putnam who stood before them, and a cloud of fear passed over Nicholas' face, for in his mind was the thought that now had come the time, despite all the promises of the past, when he must atone for his disobedience and cowardice while on board the Golden Pippin.

"I heard you were playing the nurse to Lisperard, Prout, and came to see what I might do for the poor fellow," the visitor said gravely.

"I know of nothin', colonel, that any man may do. It has come the time now when God alone may interfere in the matter."

"And he did so, Prout, when he put Anthony Lisperard in your way, for if the captain's life be saved it is to you he will owe it," and the colonel knelt down to feel of the sick man's pulse.

"These three recruits of mine, colonel, have done

as much in the way of nursin' as I have. It looks to me now as if the captain would pull through; but no one may say when in this climate a drawback will come."

"What of his chances if he could take ship for home at once, Prout?"

"Why I would say, colonel, he was as good as a well man. The ocean breezes will do him good, an' I'd answer for it, if it so happened he could be started toward New York province soon, his life was saved."

"Then we'll save him, Prout! We'll save him!"

"How do you mean, sir?" the sergeant cried in surprise.

"What I have said. Now that the fort has surrendered, it cannot be many days before our work here will be finished——"

"Then Morro is really ours, sir?"

"Ay, Prout. Is it possible you do not yet know of what has been done since yester-noon?"

"I knew the Spanish flag had been lowered from the fort, sir, an' then one of the lads came to me with the word that Anthony Lispenard was ravin' with the fever. Since that time we've done little else than try to keep the breath of life in his body. It cannot be said we've really neglected duty, since it was our captain we nursed."

“There is little fear you will ever be accused of anything like that, Prout. The fort was taken, and the remainder of our task must be accomplished within a few days. Do you remain, here—you four,—so long as the captain requires your services, and you shall be sent home by the first vessel which leaves port to carry the tidings of our victory.”

The colonel hastened away, and during the next few hours, whenever the time could be spared from their nursing, the three lads and Sergeant Prout congratulated each other again and again upon the happy prospect of being able to leave this place where death lurked in every form, until he was counted fortunate who fell by the bullets of the enemy.

Robert Clement, despite the fact that nothing could give him more pleasure than to enter New Rochelle again, began to grow almost moody amid the general joy, and Sergeant Prout, noting the expression on his face, asked solicitously :

“Why is it that your mood has changed so suddenly, lad? Surely you are not feeling sick?”

“No, indeed, sergeant, not sick from the fever; but sick of the horrible scenes which surround us.”

“This is a poor time to give way to such feelings, when has just been received the glad tidings that we are to go home by the first ship.”

“It is that which troubles me.”

“Because you are to return home?”

“Yes; if you put it that way. We enlisted, as did the others, with no promises of favor, or expectation that our time of service might expire before the remainder of the New Rochelle recruits had finished serving the king. Because it so chances that we were the ones who cared for Captain Lisperard, it has been arranged that we four leave this place of death while yet our comrades must remain. There is in my mind the fear that we be doing a cowardly act by going.”

Darius and Nicholas gazed at their comrade as if asking themselves whether he had not taken leave of his senses, and even the sergeant looked somewhat disturbed.

Then the moaning of the sick man forced the volunteer nurses to give him all their attention for the time, and an hour or more elapsed before the conversation was resumed.

Sergeant Prout was the one who introduced the topic again, and he did so by saying gravely:

“I have observed that nearly all from the Provinces who have been stricken with the fever, first give signs that their minds are wavering, and therefore it is, Robert Clement, I ask you to make full explanation of what was meant when you talked as

if it might not be right for us to carry our captain home.”

Although there was nothing in the surroundings to induce mirth, and smiles had long since been strange to the faces of those who wore the king's uniform, Robert Clement came near to laughing as he thus understood that the old man feared he was on the verge of such a collapse as had overtaken so many thousand.

“It was not the approach of the fever which caused such thoughts, as I shall soon make plain. There came to my mind the fear that by going away with our captain in the first vessel which should leave this harbor, we might in later days be accused of taking advantage of the opportunity—or in other words, of running away because we had at least the semblance of an excuse.”

“Yet you know what it would mean for Anthony Lispenard to remain here very much longer?” Sergeant Prout asked as if the lad's arguments had such weight with him that he believed it necessary to defend his course.

“Ay, sir; but yet is it required that four who can be counted ablebodied, as men in this army go, should attend him? Might not two who were recovering from the fever answer as well?”

“I begin now to get the drift of your argument, boy, and while you are to be praised for having so nice a sense of honor at a time when to hold on here is almost certain death, I believe you to be in the wrong. It was Colonel Putnam who said we four should carry the captain home, and when your superior officer says a thing, it is a command to be obeyed without question. Now this I hold to: Had the colonel said that we three must remain, and search through the hospitals for some one who could care for the captain, no word of complaint would have come from either of us. We should have taken that command exactly as we will the one which was given, and if it please God we'll breathe once more the air of New York Province.”

Robert made no attempt to refute the argument advanced by the sergeant. It would have been unnatural had he preferred to remain, and now having been convinced that he could go without loss of honor, he looked forward to that return voyage with such eagerness that the deferring of it even for an hour made him sick at heart.

Not until the city had capitulated would the commander-in-chief send tidings of a victory, and Sergeant Prout and his comrades seemed to live for but two purposes :

One to nurse their captain back to comparative

health, and the other to see the Spanish flag hauled down from the fortifications of Havana.

Morro having been taken, the fall of Punta Castle and the capture of the Spanish fleet must come before the defenders of the city would probably acknowledge themselves conquered, and from this day it became the duty of first one and then another of the little party to make a tour of the encampment in quest of information.

On the following morning Captain Lispenard's condition had not bettered ; in fact, he appeared to have lost strength, and Sergeant Prout shook his head ominously as he bent over the delirious man, while Darius muttered, not intending either of his comrades should hear the words :

“ If it so be our captain dies, it were better we had never believed it might be possible for us to go in advance of the army, for there will no longer remain any reason for sending us.”

Hearing these words by chance, Nicholas looked alarmed, and Robert turned away his face lest on it should be read the sadness which came from disappointment, rather than because greater danger threatened the officer whom they were nursing.

“ If the home voyage is to drive away the fever, it must be begun soon, else Anthony Lispenard will not be on this earth,” Sergeant Prout said in a low

tone as he turned to the flap of the tent, looking out across the plains toward the frowning walls of Morro, and from thence to Punta Castle and the city's fortifications.

It was with an evident effort that the old man rallied from the gloomy thoughts which had so suddenly seized him, and turning to the lads he said sharply :

“From this out it is agreed that one of us four move about the encampment to learn the condition of affairs. Therefore the work had best be begun at once. Nicholas, you shall have the first try at it. Do not bring back what the men *think*; but only what they have good reason for believing, and if it so be your chance to come across Colonel Putnam, say to him that our captain is rapidly growing weaker!”

Nicholas did not delay in setting out. There was no question in breaking his fast, for in those terrible hours desire for food failed to come regularly, and men ate only when hunger assailed them, rather than at stated hours.

It was Darius' turn to bring in the day's supply of water, if it so chanced he was fortunate enough to come across it, and Nicholas had no sooner departed than, with two cans slung over his shoulder, he also left the camp.

Robert's duty was to nurse the sick, and Sergeant

Prout went listlessly to the quartermaster's tent for the rations which would be served during the next three hours.

The old man was the first to return, and only one glance at his face was needed to show that he brought no good news.

"I had been foolish enough to hope the city might capitulate soon," he said as he threw his small burden carelessly down, and felt of the sick man's pulse. "Although I should have known better, there has been in my mind what was little less than a belief, that the fire from Morro would have speedy effect."

"Then nothing has been accomplished since yesterday?" Robert said with a sigh.

"No, lad. So far as can be seen the Dons are as strong as ever, an' I'll venture to say they're in better condition for fighting than we who serve the King of England. The climate don't pull their men down, because they've been bred to it, and it stands to reason the Spanish officers know as well as do ours, that by holdin' their own a certain length of time, they will come off conquerors, even though Morro has fallen."

"Why do we not increase our fire?"

"I'm told that the siege guns, as well as those of the captured fort, are being served as rapidly as possible."

“Then why does the fleet not pull inshore again?”

“Because by so doing they could hope to bring about nothing more than the loss of all the squadron. The enemy’s vessels, protected by the land, are as strong as twice their number would be on the open ocean, and can hold our naval force easily in check.”

“One would say, Sergeant Prout, that you had almost lost heart,” Robert replied, trying in vain to speak with a firm voice, and he was thoroughly alarmed to see the old man sink down on his knees as he replied tremulously :

“So I have, lad. Mayhap the fever is so near that it has made a coward of me—surely I’m afraid—sick both in body and mind!”

CHAPTER XX.

THE LATEST VICTIM.

Now indeed had Robert Clement more cause for alarm even than on that night aboard the Golden Pippin, when the recruits would have risen in mutiny against their colonel.

Sergeant Prout, having announced that "mayhap the fever had made a coward of him," suddenly fell forward on his face in such fashion as the lad had seen all too often, when the recruits from the provinces were seized with the black fever, and it needed not a glance at the old man's face to tell him that at last the soldier, who prided himself upon being in a measure acclimated, had fallen a victim to the scourge which was working the enemy's cause far more rapidly than were their bullets.

And it is not surprising that at this last blow of evil fortune he should have lost heart, for until this moment Sergeant Prout was the only one among all those from New Rochelle who had tried to keep up the courage of others.

Robert cried aloud for help, but there was none near to heed the appeal.

Throughout that vast encampment the soldiers were banded together, such of them as yet remained outside the hospitals, in companies of four, five or a dozen, for mutual protection and assistance, and so hardened had all those who wore the uniform of red become, that beyond these little coteries they refused to recognize the claims of comradeship. Men everywhere around them were being stricken down with this terrible illness, and Sergeant Prout's life was, to all save the three young recruits, no more than any other man's.

Therefore it was that even though an hundred others from his own province had been within hail, it is not probable one would have responded to Robert's call.

Danger, such as is to be met on the battle-field, makes near comrades of those who march shoulder to shoulder; but when death stalks abroad in such guise as was to be seen on every hand before Havana, a man becomes desperately selfish, and refuses that aid or sympathy which under almost any other circumstances would be voluntarily proffered.

Fortunately for Robert, at the moment the old soldier was attacked Captain Lispenard remained unusually quiet, whereas a few moments previous

he had been struggling violently to escape from his nurse.

Robert knew from sad experience that the first stage of the malady is the most difficult to manage. Sergeant Prout himself had said again and again that it was in the highest degree necessary the patient be restrained in his early delirium ; but for the moment it seemed to Robert impossible he could alone and unaided prevent these two patients, unnaturally strong in their delirium, from doing themselves or each other grievous harm.

It was only a moment the lad had for reflection.

After his collapse, and before one could have counted twenty, the old soldier was seized by that frenzy which in so many cases had proved fatal, and immediately Robert threw himself upon the sergeant to hold him down, although he understood full well how impossible would be such an attempt. In addition to this, there was every reason to fear that before many moments had elapsed the captain also would be in the same mood.

Heroic measures were necessary, even though at the moment they might seem brutal, and hastily unbuckling the sergeant's waist-belt the lad strapped it around his ankles in such manner that there was no longer any danger he might be able to strike out with his feet.

His own cross-belts were lying near at hand, and with these he succeeded in securing the old soldier's arms before the paroxysm had become too violent.

This was no more than done before Captain Lispenard sat bolt upright, staring around wildly as he muttered incoherently.

The lad had neither time nor opportunity to realize his own terrible situation. Never before, not even while the frenzied men around him were battling for water, had he been in such a painful position, and it was well, for his own mind's sake, that he had a difficult task, since it prevented his thoughts from straying into that channel which might have made of him a coward.

The situation had not improved when Darius returned, fortunately with both cans filled.

He stopped suddenly on gaining a view of the interior, and an expression of deepest fear came over his face as he shrieked rather than asked :

“What has come upon us now? Why has the sergeant been made prisoner?”

Robert replied while yet exerting all his strength to hold Captain Lispenard upon the rude couch :

“The old man has given all his attention to us, neglecting himself, until the fever has come to him.”

Darius sank down upon the hot sand much as

though he also had been attacked, and the look of fear upon his face changed to one of despair.

“Heaven help us now, for the time has come when we may no longer help ourselves,” he muttered faintly, and Robert understood that he might have a third patient on his hands, for should the boy thus lose all hope there could be but one end.

“This is not the time to think of yourself, nor to turn coward, Darius Lunt,” he cried sharply. “The man who has done so much for us now needs our aid, and so long as it is possible to assist him we would be ingrates if we did other than forget all else save his necessities.”

These harsh words aroused Darius, as perhaps nothing else could have done, and straightway he pulled himself together mentally, so to speak, rising to his feet as he said hoarsely :

“You are a brave lad, Robert Clement, and whatsoever you command, that will we do. You stand in the sergeant’s place, and your orders shall be obeyed as were his.”

“I do not ask that, Darius Lunt, nor will I accept the responsibility. The three of us must hold together as one, thinking no longer of ourselves, but as to what may be done for these brave men, now helpless as infants, who can depend upon no others than us. It may be Nicholas will bring good news,

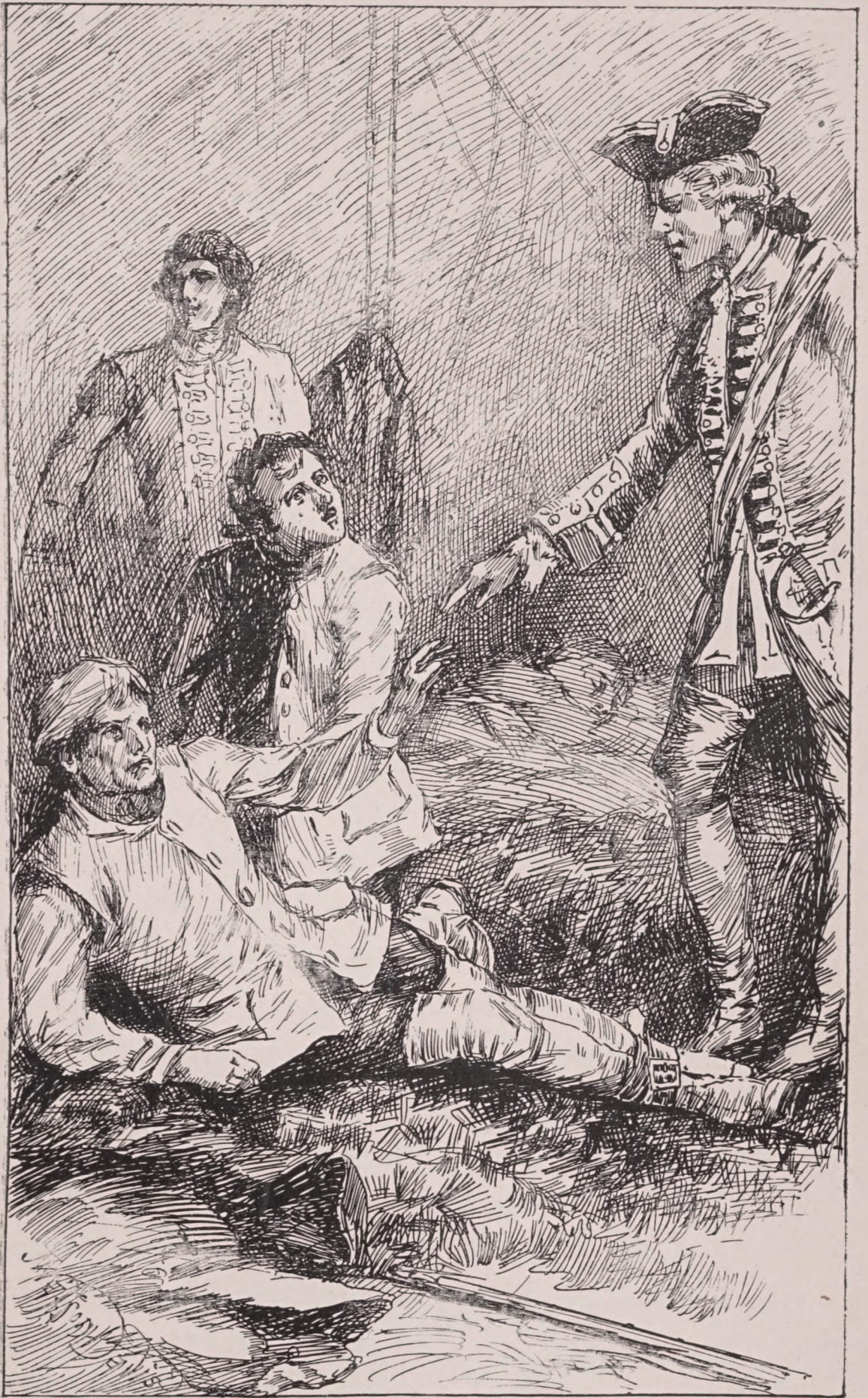
and that within a few hours a vessel sets sail for the province with the news that the city has capitulated."

"There is no reason why you should try to bolster up my courage. I am ashamed for having given way to the despair which came to us at the first sight of this last disaster. Nicholas will not bring good news, for I heard as I went through the encampment toward the water supply, that both the Spanish fleet and the fortifications were replying with greater energy to our fire this morning than ever before. Even with Morro in our possession the siege is like to be a long one, and we were foolish to shut our eyes to what is a fact. What shall I do to aid you?"

"Throw off the sergeant's bonds, if you think it will be possible to hold him down, for it pains me to see the brave man thus made a prisoner."

"I question if that be wise, Robert. Under any circumstances his strength is far greater than mine, and in the delirium of fever he will be more than a match for us both. It is better he lay in this condition a while longer, than do himself grievous injury. Think you it would be well to ask one of the surgeons to come here?"

"You know we could not get one yesterday. If the work at the hospitals be so great that they



“Has more trouble come upon you lads?” asked Colonel Putnam.—Page 337.
At the Siege of Havana.

refuse to leave when a captain is nigh to death, surely no attention will be paid to the necessities of a sergeant. Last night the old man said he was minded to try the effect of lemon juice, and if we could get a supply of that fruit it would be well to do so."

"Shall I set out in search?"

"Wait a while; it is not safe to leave me alone with two violent men. You can go after Nicholas returns."

In Captain Lispenard's case nothing had been done except to moisten his lips with water, and see that a free circulation of air was kept up in the tent. This was all the boys could do now when there were two patients instead of one, and because of the violence of the malady they were kept fully occupied during the next hour, when the flap of the tent was pulled aside, as they believed, by Nicholas.

Without looking up the two continued their arduous work as nurses, and both were surprised by hearing the question in an unfamiliar voice:

"Has more trouble come upon you, lads?"

It was Colonel Putnam who spoke, and Robert attempted to rise in order to salute, when the officer restrained him by a gesture.

"How long has the sergeant been in this condition?"

"Since two hours or more, sir."

“It is certain he has the fever?”

“He was attacked as they all are, sir, and now not a single symptom is lacking.”

The colonel gazed in silence at the distressing scene. Had it been the only case of the kind in that encampment his horror and alarm would have been aroused to the highest pitch; but it was one among thousands, and he knew full well no earthly power would avail.

“I would it was possible for me to be of some aid, lads; but you know as well as I, that all are helpless before such an affliction. Have you been called upon for military duty?”

“Not since the last assault on Morro, sir.”

“I will see to it that you three lads be reported as doing hospital duty, and if you need anything within my power to give, do not hesitate to make immediate demand.”

“Is there any good reason for believing a ship will leave soon for our province, sir?” Darius asked hesitatingly.

“No one can say. The enemy is unusually active this morning; but it may only be the final effort. Last night I tried to have Captain Lispenard taken on board one of the hospital ships; but all are reported as full to overflowing, and, as you know, the quarters ashore are crowded with invalids.”

“The captain and the sergeant will receive more careful nursing from us than they could hope for where there are so many patients,” Robert replied. “Unless they might be taken on shipboard, I do not think, with all deference to your opinion, sir, they would be benefited by going to a camp hospital.”

“Neither do I, lad, and therefore it is I have said, you shall be excused from all duty save that of caring for them. In the meantime bear in mind, for you will be needing something in the way of encouragement, that you are to sail on the first of our ships which leaves this coast.”

Then, as if unable to gaze longer at such a scene, the colonel turned abruptly away, leaving the two boys alone with their delirious officers.

Not until nearly noon did Nicholas return, and the knowledge that the old sergeant had at last succumbed to the dread malady affected him even more acutely than it had Darius.

During ten minutes or more it was as if all power of speech or movement had suddenly deserted him, and he gazed at the victims of the fever with dilated eyes.

Then it was that Robert roused him much as he had Darius.

He reproached him with showing cowardice when

his services were most needed ; pictured to his mind the possibility of seeing home once more if he bore himself like a brave man, and the certainty that he would never again walk the streets of New Rochelle unless the fear in his heart was fully conquered.

“I am going out in quest of lemons,” Robert said when he had aroused his timorous comrade somewhat, “and you must take my place here for a time.”

Nicholas went toward the unconscious captain as if only after a severe mental effort, and this hesitation Robert pretended not to see.

“The colonel might have been able to get them, if, when he asked what he needed, the want had been made known,” Darius exclaimed.

“It seemed childish to trouble him with such a request, when he had so much to sadden and dishearten him. I should be able to find the fruit at the hospitals, and if not, there must be some about the encampment.”

Both the patients were comparatively quiet at this moment, and, taking advantage of the opportunity, Robert went out, eager to draw in long breaths of the salt air which came over the sea from the direction of that province he might never step foot on again.

“What did you learn, Nicholas?” Darius asked when they were thus alone with the sick men.

“Nothing to give one courage. The enemy reply to our fire with a vigor which shows there is little fear of a failure in the supply of ammunition, and it is said by some that our men are like to grow disheartened if we fail of bringing about a capitulation within the next eight and forty hours.”

“Has the sick list increased more than might be expected?”

“That cannot be told. The surgeons are under strictest orders not to give information, and it is said that official reports are no longer to be sent the commander-in-chief, lest the truth leak out among the troops.”

There was nothing in the situation to cheer, and everything to dishearten.

Darius did not dare trust himself to speak, and Nicholas was not minded to burden him with more bad news, else might he have said that six hundred soldiers—hirelings from Europe—were in a state of insubordination bordering on mutiny; that many demanded the siege should be raised, even now when the first step toward victory had been gained.

At the expiration of an hour Robert returned with two lemons—all he could beg in the encampment, for it had suddenly come to be believed that

the juice of this fruit would go far toward reducing the fever.

“There is no longer any good reason why we should distress ourselves by gathering such information as can be gotten throughout the camp,” he said, as he set about administering the lemon-juice to the sick men. “It will be best, while we are playing the part of nurses, to shut our ears against bad news. When anything takes place to cause rejoicing, we shall learn of it quickly.”

“Do you mean that we three are to remain under cover here all the time?” Nicholas asked in surprise.

“If we do our duty there will be little opportunity for idleness. Water must be procured, and I am thinking that by extra diligence we might supply ourselves with as many lemons as are needed.”

“In what way?”

“After sunset to-night, having first begged of Colonel Putnam a pass allowing us to go beyond the lines, two of us will set out in search of fruit, going into the country where it grows——”

“Beyond the Spanish lines?” Nicholas asked in alarm, and Robert replied quietly, as if there was nothing unusual in his proposition :

“It must be so if we would be successful.”

“But the danger!”

“I fail to see that it is any greater there than here. A bullet is less to be feared than the fever.”

Darius looked up quickly in alarm. This remark savored much of despair, and experience had already taught him that such a frame of mind was the first indication of an attack by the dread malady.

“Do not be alarmed,” Robert replied with a faint smile, reading his comrade’s thought, “I am not like to be stricken while it is in my power to aid these two, one of whom has been such a true friend to us. It came into my mind, when Nicholas spoke, that he was lacking in sense who could control his fears while surrounded by so many dangers as assail us here, and yet be timid about exposing himself to that which would make an end of all suffering in this world.”

There was no further discussion regarding the proposition. It was settled that the attempt to procure a supply of lemons should be made that evening, and late in the afternoon Darius offered to go in search of Colonel Putnam in order to get the pass permitting them to leave the encampment.

While he was absent Nicholas prepared the rations which Sergeant Prout had brought in, and half an hour before sunset the three broke their fast, for until then food had seemed distasteful to them.

Colonel Putnam readily procured for them the

pass, after understanding for what purpose it was wanted, and, to Darius' surprise, did not refer to the danger of such an undertaking.

When the meal was come to an end the question arose as to which two should make the venture, and Nicholas stoutly insisted, when Darius asked if he preferred to act as nurse, that it was his right to share all the danger.

“ I have shown myself cowardly many times since the day I signed the enlistment rolls at New Rochelle, and in order to wipe out the disgrace I should volunteer for this work.”

“ We will not talk of cowardice at such a late day,” Robert replied gravely. “ Sergeant Prout himself declared you had redeemed your name, and that is enough. If no one is ready to say he will remain behind, we must draw lots.”

“ That is the proper course,” Darius replied in a tone of satisfaction, “ for then even the one who stays in camp has taken his share of the chances.”

It was left for Nicholas to hold the twigs which were to decide the question, and after Robert and Darius had each drawn one, the longest remained in his hands, for it had been agreed upon that the question should be settled in that manner.

In case both the patients should become violent at the same time it would be impossible for one to

control them, therefore, by way of precaution, Sergeant Prout was bound once more. Captain Lispenard, having grown so weak, could be cared for in his paroxysms with comparative ease.

The juice of the two lemons which Robert had brought in was not yet exhausted, and this was mixed with the water in one of the cans, after which those who were to make the venture could do nothing more toward helping their comrade.

One musket only was to be carried, for the lads did not expect to be able to defend themselves in event of an attack, and without a word by way of adieu the two left the tent.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DISCOVERY.

WHEN the two lads were come to the lines of sentinels which guarded the encampment, and had been passed beyond them without so much as a question, because of the written permission they carried, Darius asked :

“Where do you count on going? It will be dark within an hour, and we need to have a course decided upon while it's light enough to admit of our seeing the country.”

“I have no idea beyond the fact that we must have the fruit. There was in my mind only the thought that we should push straight ahead until arriving at some plantation.

“It will be a blind search, for in the darkness we might pass within five hundred yards of what we wanted, without knowing it was near at hand.”

“If you have any plan we will follow it.”

“Two or three weeks ago, when the natives were bringing fruit in so plentifully, I heard a soldier who could speak Spanish say that a large portion

of it was raised on a plantation within two miles of the city, nearly due west from the encampment. If we could come upon that place——”

“Let us travel in a westerly direction and trust to chance.”

It was a forlorn hope, this setting out blindly on the chances of coming by accident upon that for which they sought, and yet there appeared nothing better to do, therefore the boys walked rapidly forward with their faces turned westward.

They had little expectation of ending the search before nightfall, because of the long detour it became necessary to make in order to avoid the Spanish sentinels and scouting parties, and their surprise was hardly less than their pleasure when, after half an hour's rapid traveling, it was possible to see in the distance the buildings of a plantation.

“We shall finish our task and be back before Nicholas will believe we have more than well started,” Darius cried in delight. “I am told that oranges and lemons are to be found on every plantation——”

Robert halted suddenly, a look of dismay coming over his face.

“What is it? What do you see?” and Darius looked hurriedly around as if believing some danger menaced.

“I have again discovered that at times I am little better than a born simple.”

“Tell me what you mean,” his comrade cried impatiently.

“We have come out expecting to find lemons on trees, and without stopping to ask when is the season for such fruit? What would we say of two lads who believed themselves old enough to enlist as soldiers, and yet should set out to search for apples early in August?”

Darius made a wry face, for he suddenly remembered having heard Sergeant Prout declare that oranges and lemons ripened in January or February, and surely it would not be possible to find such fruit on the trees now, therefore they had made the venture in vain.

“We may as well go back,” he said ruefully. “If Colonel Putnam will advance us a little money on account of our wages, we’ll buy what is needed, providing we can make a trade with people who do not understand our language,” and then he repeated all he had heard regarding the season in which lemons ripened.

There was a look of despair on Robert’s face as he wheeled about, understanding that it was useless to continue on, and as he would have taken the first step toward the encampment a body of

men, marching in regular order, appeared in the distance.

“Spaniards!” he said in a low, quick tone, throwing himself upon the ground, and as Darius followed his example, he added. “Those are soldiers, and there are very many in line. Why should they be moving in that direction?”

Master Lunt raised himself to have a better view of the enemy and a moment later he cried:

“It is a train! The soldiers are but an escort! Look! There are ten—eleven—fourteen—sixteen wagons! They are going away from the city!”

Robert no longer thought of concealment. The knowledge that a wagon-train was moving in that direction gave him a sudden hope which was near to taking away his breath.

“Are the carts loaded?”

“Surely! See how the oxen strain and tug while going up that little hill!”

“We may be able to take into camp what will be almost as valuable as lemons!” Robert cried triumphantly. “If the Spaniards are carrying goods away from the city, what does it mean?”

“That they are getting ready to surrender!” Darius cried triumphantly, and but for his comrade’s restraining hand he would have leaped to his feet with a cheer, so great was his excitement.

“Now is the time, lad, when we may do such a service for the king that we shall no longer lack lemons, or any other thing which our invalids need. Lie low till we can say for a surety that yonder troops are convoying a train, and then we’ll go back to the camp with what is better than fruit.”

Some time before the last of the wagons arrived at a point opposite where the lads lay, night had come, and in order to carry an intelligible report back it was necessary the two advance directly toward the enemy until it should be possible, in the gloom, to make out the figures of the men.

It was so far within the enemy’s country that no skirmishers had been thrown out, and the amateur spies found little difficulty in approaching within thirty yards of the column, favored as they were by a line of shrubbery which evidently served as some boundary mark.

Sixteen wagons, heavily laden and escorted by no less than one thousand soldiers, were moving westward from the city, and there was little doubt but that the Spaniards were carrying away treasure, preparatory to surrender.

Fully two hours elapsed from the time the boys first saw this welcome sight before they believed it prudent to begin the return journey, and then it

can readily be imagined that no unnecessary moments were spent on the road.

They re-entered the English lines without fruit, but with the knowledge of that which would speedily raise the drooping spirits of the men.

“One of us must go at once to see if Nicholas needs assistance, and the other is to search for Colonel Putnam,” Robert said hurriedly, when they were within the lines.

“I will go to the tent,” Darius replied promptly. “You stand in the place of Sergeant Prout, and it is but right that you should carry the gladsome news.”

Robert did not wait to discuss the matter; but hastened away at full speed in the direction of Colonel Putnam’s quarters, and ten minutes later was standing in front of that officer describing what he had seen.

Not until he had told the story twice over was the colonel satisfied as to its correctness, and then he said as he buckled on his sword:

“You will come with me to the commander-in-chief. This is most valuable information, and in return for it you shall have whatsoever is to be had in this encampment that may be needed for your sick men.”

“If we can get a supply of lemons, sir, it will be enough, for Sergeant Prout believed that, taken in

the early stages of the fever, the juice would be beneficial.”

“It is only a whim of the old man’s; but at the same time he shall have the remedy tried on himself, if it be within the power of the Earl of Albemarle to procure it.”

Half an hour later Robert had told his story to the commander-in-chief, and Colonel Putnam vouched for it in the following words :

“Since our departure from New York I have seen much of this lad, and believe him to be truthful and reliable in all his statements.”

Robert was conducted to an adjoining tent, and there left for an hour or more, when the colonel entered in company with a lieutenant of the Provincial forces.

“This gentleman has instructions from the commander-in-chief to supply you with such delicacies as it may be possible to procure in camp. Take care of your invalids, and to-morrow evening I will see if anything further can be done by way of reward.”

The lad would have protested that he asked no payment for what had been done, but Colonel Putnam had not waited to listen, and the lieutenant hurried Robert away in order that he might obey the commands given by the Earl of Albemarle.

From this hour Sergeant Prout and his recruits did not lack attention.

Orders were issued from headquarters that a surgeon should attend the fever-stricken officers. Fruit and nourishing food was sent in great abundance, and, as soon as the rank and file of the army learned who had brought in the cheering intelligence, the boys had a large corps of volunteer assistants whenever their patients were violent.

Spies had been sent out immediately after Robert told his story, and all that they gathered but served to confirm the belief that the enemy were making ready for surrender.

Knowing that the end was really near at hand, the soldiers went about their duties in a more determined fashion, and a line of troops drawn nearly around the city told the enemy that they would no longer have opportunity to prepare for capitulation by carrying away their treasure.

Meanwhile the efficacy of lemon juice in such illnesses as had attacked the sergeant, was being tested with good results. The lads administered it in large quantities, and on the third day the old soldier was fully restored to consciousness, while forty-eight hours later he could sit up and eat what Darius declared was a "respectable meal."

It was early on the morning of August 14th that

Colonel Putnam, who had called upon the invalids and their nurses at least once each day, made his last visit to the tent on the heights, and the news he brought was in the highest degree cheering to the boys, who were looking quite as ill as the men under their charge.

“The city and the fleet have surrendered within the hour!” he announced triumphantly, “and now has come the time when Anthony’s life may be saved, if any yet remains in his body, which seems hardly probable,” he added as he bent over the apparently unconscious man. “We have done that for which we were sent here, Prout, and I hear it said there will be many millions of dollars divided among such as are left of us.”

“It is high time, sir,” the sergeant said with a faint smile. “I know not how it may be with the others who have borne the brunt of the work; but as for my recruits, I question if they would be alive at the end of another week.”

“You look as if the fever yet had a hold upon you, Prout; but all that will be driven away once you are headed for home. Lord Albemarle has given orders that one of the fastest vessels in the fleet set out at once to carry the good tidings, and she will first make the port of New York. General Lyman has granted me the favor of interceding for

Anthony Lispenard and yourself, and the two are to be sent home with these three lads as nurses. Do not fear but that your share of the prize money will be forthcoming, when it is divided, and I am free to say, Prout, that he who is able to leave this island to-day has more of good fortune than he who must perforce remain."

"Very true, sir, and while I accept your good offices for these recruits of mine, I fear me it is much like runnin' away from danger to take advantage of such a proposition as you would make, even though I am not what might be called 'able-bodied'."

"Then I shall put it in the form of a command, Prout, even though you are enrolled among the troops from New York, and I from Connecticut. This much I will say as coming from General Lyman. You four are to make ready for immediate departure with Anthony Lispenard. When we left the wreck of the Golden Pippin I said that if we came out of this campaign alive you should have a fitting reward. Therefore do not think I would put you in a position where there might be any question of your stout-heartedness. We shall yet see more service in the field, man, you and I, and your recruits, and if it so be I have not given the reward promised, then it shall be yours before

we stand shoulder to shoulder again in front of the enemy.”

“ But we are wanting no reward, sir——”

“ Of that I will speak with you later. Now make ready to go on board the ship, for it is likely she will set sail very shortly.”

* * * * *

It was Darius Lunt who set down the story of Sergeant Prout's recruits in very much the same fashion as it is told here, and his narrative ended suddenly at the point where Colonel Putnam ordered that the four return immediately to New York in charge of Captain Anthony Lispenard.

Darius must have written his account of the capture of Havana several years after it took place, for it appears much as if he brought the story to an abrupt, and perhaps unsatisfactory, ending, in order that he might relate certain events which took place in North Carolina in 1768, wherein Sergeant Prout and his recruits played a very important part.

Perhaps, also, he believed there was nothing more for him to tell, because when they set sail from the harbor of Havana the four whose fortunes he has recounted had no further part in the campaign save, to receive their proportion of the prize-money when it was divided some time later. Then, of the fourteen million milled dollars” of spoil, Sergeant Prout

received eight pounds, eighteen shillings, and eight pence, while each of his three recruits were allotted four pounds, one shilling, eight and one-half pence.

However, since Darius' story is in every minute detail true, and not even the names of the characters figuring in it are imaginary, one can finish it by reference to almost any history of those days.

In Mante's "History of the Late War in America" we read:—

"In the acquisition of Havana were combined all the advantages that could be procured in war. It was a military victory of the first magnitude; it was equal to the greatest naval victory by its effect on the marine of the Spaniards, who lost on that occasion a whole fleet. The vast quantity of tobacco and sugar collected at Havana on the Spanish monarch's account, sold on the spot, exclusive of the ships and merchandise sent to and sold in England, for seven hundred thousand pounds, which was divided amongst the conquerors. . . .

". . . The Earl of Albemarle being expressly ordered when the Havana service should be over to turn the same number of troops to North America that he had received from thence, he embarked the fifth brigade for that continent; but most of them died in the passage or in the hospitals immediately on their arrival; and the artillery sent with

them was entirely lost at sea. The troops which remained were not much more fortunate, being by this time so reduced by sickness that even seven hundred could not be mustered in a condition to do duty."

THE END.

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