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A TORY PLOT.

A Story of the Attempt to Kill
General Washington in 1776.

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BY JAMES OTIS.

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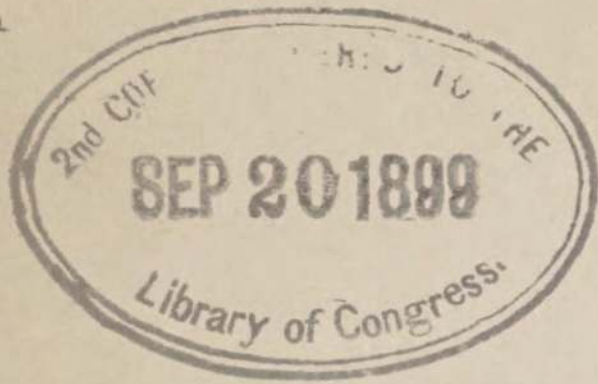


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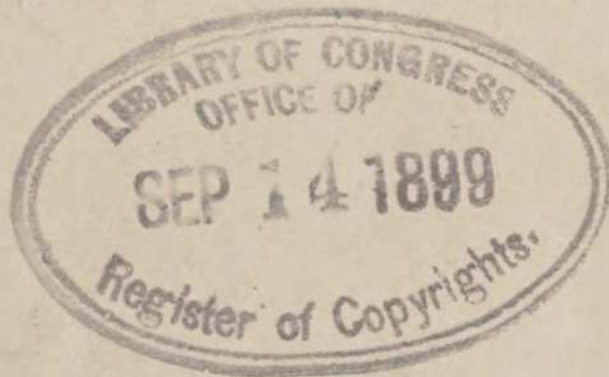
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A TORY PLOT.

By JAMES OTIS.

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NOTES.

“A PLOT originated by Tryon, to murder the American general officers on the arrival of the British, or at best to capture Washington and deliver him to Sir William Howe, was discovered at this time. It was arranged to blow up the magazine, secure the passes to the city, and at one blow deprive the Republicans of their leaders, and by massacre or capture annihilate the ‘rebel army.’ Mayor Matthews was one of the conspirators; and from his secure place on board the Duchess of Gordon, Tryon sent money freely to bribe Americans. Two of Washington’s guard were seduced, but the patriotism of a third was proof against their temptations, and he exposed the plot. Matthews, Gilbert Forbes (a gunsmith on Broadway), and about a dozen others, were immediately arrested

and sent prisoners to Connecticut. It was ascertained that about five hundred persons were concerned in the conspiracy. Thomas Hickey, one of the guard, was hanged on the 27th of June, 1776. This was the first military execution in New York."—*Lossing's "Field Book of the Revolution," Vol. II., page 595.*

"Governor Tryon, like so many of the royal governors that year, had taken refuge on ship-board, whence he schemed and plotted with his friends on shore. A plan was devised for blowing up the magazines and seizing Washington, who was either to be murdered or carried on board ship to be tried for treason, according as the occasion might suggest. The conspiracy was discovered in good time; the Mayor of New York, convicted of correspondence with Tryon, was thrown into jail, and one of Washington's own guard, who had been bribed to aid the nefarious scheme, was summarily hanged in a field near the Bowery. Such a discovery as this served to throw discredit upon the Tory party."—*Fiske's "American Revolution," Vol. I., page 190.*

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A TORY PLOT.

CHAPTER I.

LLOYD AND DENNYS.

AT the corner of Lumber and Stone Streets in the city of New York, on a certain June day in 1776, two lads of possibly fifteen or sixteen years of age, were standing gazing at each other with something very like consternation written upon their faces.

The eldest, who could not have been more than two months the senior, was Lloyd Dacre. His companion and particularly intimate friend was Dennys Howland, a lad who came from "good fighting stock," according to Master Willett, and who was, like his comrade, Lloyd Dacre, especially devoted to the cause of the

Colonies, although for one reason and another which seemed good and sufficient, he had not formally enlisted in the army.

Dennys had just come from Whitehall Slip with certain indefinite information which was, to say the least, disquieting to those who loved the cause, and had made known the result of his newsgathering in the following words :

“It is said there are more than five hundred men and lads in New York, every one of whom is as bitterly opposed to the king as we, who believe it would be of advantage to the cause if General Washington was removed from the command of the army.”

“Surely you have met with those who are inclined to play upon your credulity,” Lloyd said almost sharply, and his friend replied with no little show of heat :

“If I say to you that Master Matthews, the mayor of the city, be one who holds to such opinion, then what will you think ?”

“That he has suddenly lost his senses, or been bought with British gold. Since Governor Tryon believed his precious body was safer on board the armed ship, *Duchess of Gordon*, than in his residence here, it has been told me that he is lavish with the king’s money, particularly among those who have espoused the cause but are yet weak-kneed, fearing lest the king may crush them in his wrath.”

“Be that as it may, Lloyd, the truth remains as I have spoken. There is being hatched in this city a plot against our General Washington.”

“If such be the case it were well you had asked for an interview with the commander-in-chief even before spending the time to meet me here.”

“And a pretty figure would I cut though an audience was granted! What think you would be my reception if I presented myself to General Washington and said that I had heard these

things among the idle ones at Whitehall Slip?"

"He would demand some proof that your statement was true."

"Of a surety. And how could I give it him? I am certain that mischief is being hatched, but more I cannot say."

Denny's earnest tone had had its effect upon his friend, and Lloyd stood gazing in mingled fear and bewilderment during a certain number of seconds when neither spoke, and then he asked, as if believing it was impossible to solve what appeared much like a riddle:

"What was in your mind, Dennys, when you came to me? Had you a thought that perchance I might be able to put a stopper on this plot—if plot there be?"

"There was no reason why I should repeat this thing, save that you were my friend, and one whom I did not believe would cast ridicule upon another's good intentions. It had come

to me that perchance we might be so fortunate as to gain the proof which General Washington would demand, and in such season that the wickedness which is now spreading over the city, thanks to Governor Tryon's gold and Master Matthews' tory inclinations, could be crushed out."

"And in what way, Dennys, might you and I compass all this?" Lloyd asked, still inclined to doubt what his friend had told him.

"That I know not; but if it could be that we might overturn these traitors, it would benefit the cause wondrously—we should be accomplishing more than if we had signed our names to the rolls of some company and were carrying muskets."

"All that I grant you, and right willingly would I do all in my power; but it seems to me much as though it might be working in the dark and at random, for how may we two expect those who conspire against the com-

mander-in-chief to divulge their plans to us ?”

“It could easily be compassed if you were of the mind to take part in the work.”

“I have already said I would do so willingly, but I know not how we should set about it.”

“I am not quick-witted as you are, Lloyd, and fail to see those difficulties which you perceive at a glance ; but it has come into my mind that if we were willing to give certain people in this city to understand we might join them in their purpose, all which now seems dark would be made plain.”

“Do you mean that we should become conspirators ?” Lloyd asked, moving back a pace as if angry such a suggestion had been made, and his friend replied with more of confidence than he had as yet displayed :

“Ay, so that good might come thereby.”

“But it may be, Dennys, that there are others in this city as far-sighted as you—that your dis-

covery of the plot is not the first, and we, joining the conspirators, might find ourselves some fine day between two files of soldiers, charged with aiding and abetting those who would ruin the colony."

"I know full well that I am slow at argument, Lloyd, and not so keen but that there may be many true Americans who have learned more than the little I heard at Whitehall Slip; but in such case no harm could be done by my zeal, nor, if my plan was carried out, would it be possible we should be charged with any such horrible crime."

"How would you prevent it? Suppose that at this moment General Washington knew what was being done, and only awaited the proper time when he should lay his hand heavily upon the conspirators? Then if we were among them think you the plea that we had joined the ranks of the traitors simply to aid the cause would be believed? Surely it would be a most lame de-

fense, for all might say the same in order to save their necks."

"I admit the truth of what you say, providing I propose to set about it in that bungling fashion. It was in my mind, however, to be more careful how I consorted with traitors."

"In what way?"

"I would present myself to General Putnam, who, as you know, is friendly toward my father, and telling him what little has been learned by me this day, make an offer to put myself in a position to hear more, which I doubt not could be readily done."

"Now it appears to me that there is in your mind something of moment, Dennys Howland," and Lloyd evinced quite as much of interest as he previously had of apathy. If you, having heard only so little of this supposed conspiracy, can make a plan which would enable us to be of benefit to the cause, I am with you heart and soul, as I ever am in anything you proposed."

“It has taken you a long while to come to that conclusion.”

“Because you were so slow in getting at the point, I had supposed you counted on going ahead blindly, and even now there is much you have left unprovided for.”

“In what way?”

“First it appears to me that for two lads like you and I to undertake the overthrow of plans laid by such men as Governor Tryon and Master Matthews, is a task beyond our powers; but even though we should be so fortunate as to succeed, much time must be spent, and how will you account at home for your absence?”

“It is not my purpose to leave the city, for from all I have heard the conspirators are here doing their work directly under the eyes of the commander-in-chief.”

“Even in such case you must be much abroad on the streets, and that we have been warned against.”

“I had counted on making my father acquainted with all I would do, after having seen General Israel Putnam. If it so be that officer appears to believe we might be of service, then the necessary arrangements could readily be made; but if he should laugh at my presumption, then no one save you would know I had allowed myself to be so foolish.”

Lloyd could conjure up no more bugbears against the plan proposed by his friend, and during this conversation he had come to believe that Dennys' ideas were not only practicable, but might be the means of enabling them to win much credit, and perhaps renown, boys though they were.

“When would you go to General Putnam?” he asked.

“At once, if you are disposed to bear me company, and should he laugh at my plans there need be no further conversation between us regarding what seems to me a most serious

matter, although you are disposed to cast discredit upon its importance."

"Not so, Dennys. It is in my mind that if you can so already get information of such a plot, it must really be known to General Washington and his officers. I do not view the matter lightly; but only question whether it is being kept a profound secret when a lad may overhear it on the street, as you have done."

"All that may be known, once we have had speech with General Putnam, and if you are agreed, we will go to him now."

Lloyd gave token of his willingness by starting off at a rapid pace up Stone Street toward Broadway, and before they were arrived at the mansion formerly occupied by Captain Kennedy of the British army, where was General Putnam's headquarters, he was quite as eager in the business as his friend; but exceedingly doubtful as to the kind of a reception they they might meet with from the officer.

It was not a simple matter for the two lads to gain an interview with the busy soldier, for there were many waiting to see him; but these boys were admitted in turn as though they were important citizens, and once they stood before him Dennys' confidence vanished. His tongue did not run as glibly as while he was laying the matter before his friend, and standing uneasily, first on one foot and then the other, he stammered and hesitated until the general said with more of kindness than of impatience in his tone:

“Well, my lad, what is it? Why have you two come?”

“My comrade believes he has heard that which if not already known to you, sir, is of importance,” Lloyd said courteously, and it was as if this served to restore to Dennys his self-possession, for without awaiting a reply from the general, he said promptly:

“First by accident, and then through eaves-dropping, I have learned that there is in this city

a conspiracy among several hundred of the citizens to do a mischief to the commander-in chief, and it was in my mind that you should be made acquainted with the fact."

Lloyd expected to see a smile come over the general's face, and to hear him say that this was stale news; but instead the officer appeared decidedly concerned, as he began to question Dennys sharply.

"Where did you hear anything of the kind, lad?"

"Near to Whitehall Slip, sir. I saw a soldier of the commander-in-chief's guard talking with some boatmen whom I knew, and on drawing near for the purpose of accosting my acquaintance, the man said: 'We already number more than five hundred, who are minded to make a change of commanders.' The fact of his being in uniform caused me to think there was something sinister in the words, and I loitered until one of the boatmen said something

to this effect: "You may be certain, Master Hickey, that we are with you, so far as was first proposed; but now that you talk of shedding blood, we would wait awhile until the matter can be digested.'"

"Well, well, what then?" General Putnam asked, as if impatient to hear the remainder. "Did you learn nothing more?"

"They spoke in lower tones from that out; but it was to my mind as if the soldier bore heavily upon them because they would shrink from their oaths, and he seemed to threaten, whereat the boatman asked further questions, of which I could catch only here and there a word, until I was drawn so nigh that the conversation ceased."

"What did you gather from this last portion of their talk?"

"That the soldier was urging them to hold fast to some portion of a plan which he had just made known, and that it concerned the

commander-in-chief I know, because his name was spoken many times. Not only that, but Master Matthews himself, the mayor, was brought into the talk as if he had some influence over this soldier."

"What was the name you repeated as having been applied to the member of the guard?"

"They called him Master Hickey, sir."

General Putnam made note of this fact, and then turned toward Dennys expectantly, whereat the latter, determined to present his plan while yet there was time, said eagerly :

"If it might be, sir, that two lads like my comrade and I could be of service, it would pleasure us greatly. Prevented from enlisting because of our mothers' fears, we would do all in our power so it could be said we had benefited the cause."

"I know of no other way to gain your wish save by persuading your parents to agree to an enlistment."

“Why could we not learn more regarding this plot, sir?” Dennys asked, now grown bold because of the general’s friendly bearing.

“How might you do that, young sir?”

“If it should be that we represent ourselves as willing to go into the wicked plans of these men, it is not impossible that they would trust us.”

“And you would spy upon them?”

“You may call it by any name you please, sir, so that we do the work, and are able to give you yet further information.”

“Have you your parents’ consent to do such a thing?”

“No, sir; but that might be gained. I think you know my father, Abraham Howland?”

“I do indeed, and if you be his son then I may have confidence in you. Who is your comrade?”

“Lloyd Dacre.

“Is his father living?”

“Ay, sir,” Lloyd replied. “He is a merchant doing business on Beaver Street.”

“I think I have heard his name among those who have aided the cause with money.”

“Yes, sir; that he has done as I know.”

“And you two lads would turn conspirators for the time being? Why did you not do so before coming to me; then perchance your budget of news had been larger?”

“We were not certain but that you knew all this some time since, and instead of merely playing the part of conspirators, we might be apprehended as really plotting against General Washington.”

“It was well thought of, lad, for while as yet I have no other knowledge concerning this alleged conspiracy, it might be discovered at any moment, and you would not have done well to play the spy without having first taken some precaution.”

“Then you see no reason why we should

not do as I have said, sir?" Dennys asked eagerly.

"None, my lad, and perchance it may be a most expeditious method of ferreting out the plot. You two boys would hardly be suspected of joining the conspirators for the purpose of betraying them, and if it so chance that you succeed in learning all we might wish to know, I promise, so far as one may for another, that General Washington will reward you generously for the service."

"It is not for the sake of reward, sir, that we would do this thing; but in order that we might aid the cause in such manner, because we are forbidden to serve the colony with muskets."

"You speak well, lad, and much as would your father. I will make note here of all you have said, and leave it in the hands of a trusty person, so that, should any accident befall me, it can readily be made known why you

consorted with traitors to the cause. It is not well you should come here too often after once having pretended to join these men. Therefore in due time I will send some one who shall make himself known to you, and to whom you can repeat all you have learned without fear that it will be told to any but myself."

Having thus spoken he rose to his feet, and Dennys believed this movement to be an intimation that the interview should come to an end.

He and Lloyd bowed respectfully, as boys should to their seniors, and as they withdrew heard General Putnam say to an officer who had that moment entered :

"Major, is Paul Stubbs on duty outside?"

"He is, sir?"

"Have him note well these two lads who are just going out, so that should occasion require, he may recognize them again."

The major turned quickly, stepping in

advance of Lloyd and Dennys, and the two saw him speak to a private soldier who was standing on guard in the hallway of the house, whereat the man favored them with a searching look as they passed, and Lloyd whispered to his comrade:

“It seems much as if we had only succeeded in bringing suspicion upon ourselves.”

“How may that be?”

“Yonder soldier has been told to remember our faces so he may find us again when we are wanted, which means that the general might decide we had not told all the truth.”

“You are oversuspicious and unreasonably so, for that command was given by General Putnam in a tone loud enough for us to hear, and as I take it he intended we should know that the soldier on duty there would be the one he would send to have speech with us after we were well set about our work.”

“It may be you are right,” Lloyd said

thoughtfully, "and yet to be pointed out thus is not to my mind."

"Perhaps the time may come when you will cease to doubt the motive of every person around you; but I question whether my life will be long enough to see that moment, for you are prone to be suspicious of everyone—even me—when a slip of the tongue gives you a fancied cause."

"In these times it is better to suspect every man, and thereby keep on your guard, than to believe each one you meet is a friend, and some day find your confidence betrayed."

This was a matter concerning which the boys often spoke, and sometimes with great heat, for Lloyd's suspicious nature showed itself strongly now and then, much to the displeasure of his friend.

"We will not go back to that subject to-day at least," Dennys said with a laugh after a brief pause, "for we have embarked upon an adven-

ture which may make our names famous when, many years after we are dead, people read of this resistance to the king's oppression."

"Already you have found a plot and crushed it," Lloyd replied with a hearty laugh.

"Do not think my mind runs so far in the future as that; but we have taken a certain number of strides toward crushing the conspiracy, if there be one, for now we are fully authorized to set about the work."

"And you will begin it at once?"

"So soon as I have gained my father's permission, and it is in my mind that it would be well for both of us to start fair in this matter, by first making all the necessary arrangements. I will go home now, and you shall do the same. We will partake of our dinner as if we were the idle lads of the city that we were an hour ago, and as soon as may be thereafter, meet nearabout the Exchange, or perhaps Dock Street would be better, just beyond Broad."

“Is it in that quarter you expect to find your conspirators?”

“It is near Whitehall Slip that we may find the boatman of whom I spoke, and once that has been done I am of the mind that the rest will be easy.”

“I still hold to it that if this plot is talked of so boldly on the public streets, and if you may learn all concerning it by asking a few questions, then it is of no great importance to us, or of danger to the commander-in-chief.”

“Yet General Putnam was not of that same opinion, for he gave us an attentive ear when I repeated the story.”

“Perhaps he did so because of his friendship for your father.”

“He knew not who I was at the time, but listened eagerly to what I said. However, there is no reason, Lloyd, why you should join me in what may prove to be a thankless task, unless it is your desire, for peradventure, one may ac-

comply as much as two, and I am willing to take upon myself the ridicule in case this proves to be a bugbear, for the sake of learning to a certainty whether it be of importance."

"You speak as if it were possible for you to do as you please in the matter."

"I believe by adroitly speaking I can persuade these boatmen that I am ready to take part in the plot, for it is my purpose to let them know that I have an inkling of it."

"And you believe they will welcome a boy to their ranks?"

"Why not? Surely I might do as much as a man in such wickedness."

"I shall remain with you, Dennys, if for no other purpose than to prevent you from running your head into trouble, for there is in my mind the idea that if—mind you I say *if*—there be anything of a serious nature in this supposed conspiracy, then there may be somewhat of danger to you who would betray the secret."

“Of that I have no doubt, yet I am willing to make the venture because of the good which may come from it. Now if you will, let us go home, and meet by the Exchange an hour later.”

CHAPTER II.

GILES SMART.

IT WAS nearly three o'clock when the two friends were again together on Dock Street, near the Exchange.

Dennys had been at the rendezvous nearly an hour before Lloyd appeared, and but for the confidence he had in his friend he might not have lingered, believing Lloyd had abandoned the enterprise.

“I knew you would come, else I had not remained idle nearly two hours,” he said when his comrade appeared, breathless, as if from rapid running. “I was certain you would at least meet me to say you had given over the work, if such was the case; but the time has seemed long nevertheless.”

“My father was late in coming home, and it was necessary I see him first,” Lloyd replied.

“Then he gave his consent?”

“Yes; but not right willingly. He believed there was more of danger than honor to be gained in such an adventure, and said it would be more manly to enlist as a soldier than play the sneak upon the streets in the hope of trapping the unwary.”

“Does he call it playing the sneak to do that which may perhaps be the means of saving General Washington’s life?” Dennys asked hotly.

“He fails to look at the matter as you do, believing that the words spoken at Whitehall Slip were idle ones, having no real meaning.”

“Why does he assume that?”

“Because you mentioned one of the general’s guard as seeming to be the leader, and my father says that is impossible, for every soldier in that company is tried and true—that he would as

soon think General Putnam himself had turned traitor as that one of those soldiers should be false to his oath."

"It is nevertheless true that I heard him speaking words which breathed not only of disloyalty, but of murder."

"That you believe so I have no question, Dennys; I but told you what my father said, in explaining why I was late at the rendezvous," and now Lloyd spoke impatiently, as if he was not minded to go into further details.

"But he gave his consent finally?"

"Ay, else I should not be so long in the explaining; yet it was grudgingly given, and I am almost persuaded that the venture we intend to make is a foolish one."

"Then why embark upon it? I can go alone—perhaps not as well; but yet to such effect that the purpose may be served."

"I the same as agreed to do so before General Putnam, and shall not now go back on my word,



Caleb Billings was sitting upon a boat, which had been drawn upon the landing-stage.—Page 29.

whatever opinion I may hold," Lloyd replied sharply. "You are the one who has proposed this scheme, therefore it is your place to take the lead. What is to be done?"

"To my mind it is best we find the boatman whom I know, Caleb Billings, and with him we will loiter, if it so be he has no work on hand."

"You think to find him at Whitehall Slip?"

"Yes," Dennys replied, and without further conversation he led the way in that direction, Lloyd following a few paces behind as if to show that while he joined in the venture he did not give it his full countenance.

The amateur spies had no difficulty in finding Caleb Billings; he was a boatman who most enjoyed lounging around the wharves, and most disliked plying his vocation. He was sitting upon a boat which had been drawn up on the landing-stage, and with him was a young man whom neither of the boys remembered to have seen before.

Billings greeted the lads in a careless fashion as if to intimate that he was not in a mood, or lacked the time, to hold converse with them, and continued speaking animatedly to his companion, but guarding his voice so that the words might not be overheard.

Dennys, intent only on the part he had proposed to play, pressed forward, intruding himself upon Master Billings' notice; but Lloyd held back, and for the moment was pleased that he did so, when he heard the boatman say:

“At some other time, young sir, I will be glad to have speech with you; but now my moments are occupied.”

Hearing this Lloyd stepped back yet further; but Dennys, on the contrary, advanced another pace.

“Perhaps you speak of that, Master Billings, in which I would share.”

Both the boatman and the stranger looked up quickly—Dennys fancied suspiciously—

when he thus spoke, and after manifest hesitation, the boatman asked :

“How can you know what may be the subject of our conversation ?”

“I may guess from that which I have seen, and more because of knowing certain matters.”

“Such as what ?” the stranger asked sharply.

“That it would be of benefit to the Colony if some other was in command of the American forces.”

Now the two men exchanged glances, and the stranger whispered, yet not so loud but that Dennys could hear quite distinctly :

“Is he one of us ?”

“Not as I know.”

“Then it is well we learned how he has come by his knowledge, or his suspicion, whichever it may be.”

At this the boatman, looking around to make certain there was none save Lloyd who might overhear his words, asked :

“Why should you have said it were better some other were in command of the American forces?”

“That I cannot rightly explain, Master Billings. I know this much, however: That such talk is being made, and that there be gold for those who are of the same mind.”

“Then it is only for gain you have come to that opinion?” the stranger asked.

“That is as may be,” Dennys replied, beginning to fear he had been too abrupt in thus attempting to play his part.

Now it was he would have drawn back, and begun by making apologies for having intruded, saying he would return later when Master Billings might be at liberty; but before he could move away by even so much as a pace, the stranger detained him.

“It is well you should explain yourself at greater length, young sir,” and the man laid hold of Dennys’ collar as if thinking he might

attempt to run away. "We must know what you meant by those words, else the consequences are likely to be serious for you."

"That I cannot say of a verity," Dennys replied, wishing most sincerely he had been less abrupt in his method of beginning the task.

"You can explain why you made such a remark."

"Yes, and yet it will be in a lame fashion. I have heard now and then a word here and there, and seen at various times certain men together who appeared to be interested in some weighty matter, and I desire to have a hand in it, for whatsoever is for the good of the Colony, that I would do, even though I be but a boy."

"What words have you heard?"

"Only so much as gave me to understand, so I have already said, that it would be better if some other were in command of the forces. Of a verity, that is all I know, sir."

"And yet, understanding no more than that,

you would blindly go into any business which might be serious?"

"I would do whatsoever I could that seemed best for the Colony."

"But your comrade, who hangs back as if timorous, is he of the same opinion?"

Suspiciously inclined though he might be, Lloyd was not cowardly, and having embarked upon this venture, had no idea of deserting his friend at the moment when he appeared to be getting himself into difficulties.

"That I am," he replied, promptly stepping forward, and Master Billings asked with no little show of suspicion :

"How does it come that the son of Master Dacre, a wealthy man, as I have been told, would loiter here or there in the hope of picking up a gold-piece which might not be come at without hard labor—perhaps through danger?"

"Even though my father be wealthy, I might have as much affection for gold as you, Master

Billings, and perchance be inclined to the same way of thinking."

The boatman and the stranger exchanged glances once more, and it seemed as if there was a question in the former's eyes, for it was answered by a nod, whereat Master Billings said :

"Young sirs, this be Master Giles Smart, of whom mayhap you have heard."

"There was one by that name, if I remember rightly, in Governor Tryon's household," Dennys replied, understanding now that he was face to face with him who was most active in the plot, if indeed a plot existed. "I have heard it said, however, that when the governor took refuge on the Duchess of Gordon, Master Smart decided to return to England."

"That he did not do so you have good proof," the stranger said with a smile as of friendliness, and he added after another glance at the boatman, "It may be you young gentlemen can

embark in an enterprise which will bring to all concerned not only much gold, but rich rewards to those who prove themselves worthy."

"We are ready, sir, for anything which promises well," Dennys said at the same time that a sensation as of fear came over him because he was progressing so rapidly in the task.

He had believed it would be exceeding difficult to compass his purpose, and yet here at the very outset, before having been engaged in the work ten minutes, was the plot about to be opened before him.

As for Lloyd, he now began to understand that there was much more in these chance words his comrade had heard than either his father or himself believed, and something very like fear was in his heart also, when this man whom he knew must be one of the leaders in the conspiracy, appeared willing to enroll them in the list of those who would wreck the cause of American liberty.

“You are not so eager, it seems to me, when the way is opened for you,” Master Billings said with a laugh. “If it so be you lads have heard aught concerning the business project, and were willing to enter it, why do you seemingly draw back now?”

“There is no thought in our hearts of drawing back,” Lloyd replied. “We but await Master Smart’s explanations or propositions, whichever he may have to make.”

“Do you expect he will explain his purposes to every curious one who comes?”

“I was led to think he would do so with us, because of that which he said.”

“It may be I shall, young sirs,” Master Smart replied; “but it will first be necessary for me to know whether I may have perfect confidence in you. I am not disposed to deny but that we have on hand an adventure which promises richly for those who embark in it; but yet we can enlist none save the most trustworthy, and

must have some guarantee of good faith from each who joins us."

"How may we give such as that?" Dennys asked in perplexity. "Master Billings knows us, and more than that cannot be said by any one. He also is acquainted with our fathers."

"And it is because of that, perhaps, that Master Smart hesitates," the boatman said. "I know your father, Lloyd Dacre, and with all due respect, believe him to be a man who always looks to see on which side his bread is buttered. If perchance the colonies will give him more advantage, then is he a true American; but let the king show him that his interest might lay at court, and he would speedily become what some of the good people in this city are pleased to call a Tory. As for your father, Dennys Howland, I cannot speak so satisfactorily. It is said he has taken up the cause of the Colonists and no man holds to a purpose as steadfastly as Abraham Howland."

“And how may that be to my credit or discredit?” Dennys said.

“I leave the answer for Master Smart,” the boatman said, and straightway he fell silent as if not minded to bear any further part of the conversation.

Master Smart remained as if in deep thought, and the boys gazed at him inquiringly, but not venturing to speak until after two or three minutes had thus passed, when Dennys made bold to say :

“So much has been hinted at that now it would seem as if we must know more.”

“What price are you willing to pay for the information?” Master Smart asked at length.

“What price?” Dennys repeated, and both the boys looked perplexed.

“Ay, I meant those exact words. If, from motives of gain you would join in the adventure, there must be something contributed by you, else why should others accept you as partners?”

“There is no reason, save it should be that lads like us, who can do a man’s work, might be needed,” Dennys replied.

“Even though they should be, there are plenty who stand ready to take advantage of the opportunity, and would be willing to pay the price demanded,” Master Smart repeated, and his words only served to further increase the bewilderment of the lads.

“Why do you not tell us what it is you demand?” Lloyd asked. “We cannot agree to, or refuse, a matter of which we know nothing.”

“The price set upon a share in the adventure, which will enrich and perhaps ennoble those who bear a hand in it, is a guarantee of good faith, concerning which I have already spoken. Now I would know how far you lads may be willing to go in order to give us that pledge?”

“Make the demand, and we shall speedily

see whether we can comply with it or not," Lloyd replied.

"Will you go with me on board the Duchess of Gordon?"

"To what end?"

"That we may there satisfy the governor who is in authority over you."

"On what point might we give him satisfaction?"

"That you are, and will be, loyal to the king."

"But that is what we are not," Dennys replied quickly, as a sudden thought came into his mind. He realized now was come the time when he might prevent suspicion from attaching to this effort to enter the plot. "That we are not," he repeated, "nor shall we be until it is shown more to our interest."

"Meaning you would serve for the highest price, either king or colony?"

"It is somewhat of that nature, Master

Smart; yet perhaps we would not put it in such words."

"Do you refuse to board the Duchess of Gordon with me?"

"Not so," Lloyd replied promptly. "Yet we would much prefer to receive some assurance before going that it would be to our interest."

"And whose word would you lads most desire?"

"Almost any one would suffice for us," Dennys said. "If this venture be one that honest men may embark in, whether it be in favor of the king or no, why should not some one of our men high in authority be able to advise?"

"Would you listen well to the worthy Master Matthews, the mayor of this city?"

"Ay, that we would, and do whatsoever he should advise."

"Without appealing to your fathers?"

“There is no reason why we should make further riddles; Dennys exclaimed as if tiring of this roundabout fashion of coming to the point. “I believe this adventure of which you speak has somewhat to do with work the king would have done. We are not unwilling to join in it, and would readily board the Duchess of Gordon with you, should Master Matthews say he knew by his own knowledge that it might be done by such as we.”

Now it was that Master Smart called the boatman aside, and the two held a private conversation upon the question, as the boys believed, of admitting them into such a conspiracy, and Dennys could not forbear whispering to his comrade:

“It was more than idle words that I heard, Lloyd Dacre, and the work upon which we set out seems easy of accomplishment.”

“I admit I was wrong in making sport of what seems to be a serious matter, and I have

no doubt we shall soon gain all the information which is wanted; but there is something in this desire to have us go on board the *Duchess of Gordon* which perplexes me. I suspect it to be a plot against us."

"Why should they attempt to work us harm when by refusing to speak we had kept outside of the conspiracy? It would be fools' work to give us their secret, and then do us a mischief because we had it."

"True; but yet I like not the thought of visiting Governor Tryon."

"If that be the only price we are asked to pay, we shall of a surety get our knowledge cheaply, and what appears equally well for us, we are like to know that Master Matthews is engaged in this plot against the colonies."

There was no opportunity for the boys to speak further on the subject, for by this time Master Smart had concluded his consultation with the boatman and advanced toward them.

“You shall be assured that the adventure in which we would have you embark is a worthy one; but it may not be done at once. All the sureties cannot come from our side. It is true we would have you join us in the work, and will satisfy all your scruples, as you must ours.”

“How may that be done?” Dennys asked.

“Are you minded to give a certain portion of your time, say twenty-four hours, to this adventure, without knowing what it may be?”

“But if we are?”

“Then it will seem to me that you have earned the right to be assured all we would do is for the good of the colony. That much Master Matthews shall make plain to you. Then you will solemnly swear to reveal to no one, and particularly to your fathers, what we would do, promising meanwhile to work faithfully toward the accomplishment of our purpose.”

“You speak in riddles, sir,” Dennys said,

“and mayhap the better way of reading them will be for you to tell us in plain words what you want done.”

“We have need of a messenger, and I had come to seek out Billings for such purpose. Now will you undertake a mission which is simply to deliver a letter to one in the garrison at West Point, promising that no person shall have reason to suspect what you may be about?”

“And that is all there is to the work?”

“To deliver the letter secretly; that is all.”

“Then we will undertake it,” Lloyd said quickly. “But first it will be necessary we make some explanation to our parents, else would it be thought we had fallen into the hands of the press-gang.”

“Make whatsoever explanation you will so that you tell not the truth,” Master Smart said, “and when you are prepared for the journey come here. Either Caleb Billings or myself

will give you further instructions. Set off at once, for I would have you begin the mission within the hour."

Without further delay the boys started at a rapid pace down Dock Street, and when they were well beyond earshot of the conspirators, Dennys said with a chuckle of satisfaction :

"It will not be long before we can acquaint General Putnam with a secret of great moment, else what is the meaning of this assurance from Master Matthews, and the desire that we board the Duchess of Gordon in order to pay our respects to Governor Tryon?"

"There is much of wickedness being hatched in this city, and I am ashamed to think I should have laughed at your words this morning. If it could be——"

He was interrupted by a young man in the garb of a civilian, who stepped directly in front of him in such manner as to block the way, and looking up Lloyd fancied the stranger's face

was familiar, yet could not remember where he had seen it before.

“Have you anything to tell me?” the man asked in a whisper, lurching against Lloyd as he spoke in such a manner one would have believed him to be under the influence of liquor, and that the encounter was an accident.

“What should I have to tell you?” Lloyd asked in surprise.

“I was sent by one whom you visited this afternoon.”

“Is it the soldier?” Dennys asked, literally trembling with excitement.

“It is—the one whom you heard called ‘Paul Stubbs.’ Now tell me quickly, lest any one should see us speaking; would you send word to General Putnam?”

As briefly as might be the boys explained the substance of the interview with Master Smart, and stated that there was no question but that they would receive permission from

their parents to do as the conspirators had requested.

“We shall set out within the hour,” Dennys said in conclusion, “and most likely be back some time to-morrow.”

“Take boat from nearabout the foot of Barclay Street, if it so be you can, or if they provide one for you at Whitehall Slip, stop at the place I have mentioned, for it may be the general would give you some instructions; but this much seems to me necessary for you to do: Mark well to whom this letter, or whatever it may be, is delivered; take good heed of the man’s face, so that you may be able to point him out at any time it becomes necessary.”

“Then you know of the work in which we are engaged?”

“The major has since given me a hint, so that I may do my share of the task understandingly, and were I in your place I should remember every person with whom I came in contact, for

it seems to me that is the most important part of your task."

As he said this Paul Stubbs lounged in apparently an aimless fashion up the street, and the two lads hastened toward their homes.

CHAPTER III.

THOMAS HICKEY.

NO MORE than an hour had elapsed before Lloyd and Dennys were hastening once more toward Whitehall Slip, almost quivering with excitement at the thought that they were serving the colony in a work so important as to overshadow anything they might be able to do as soldiers.

It had not been a simple matter to gain permission of their parents to venture to West Point.

Dennys' father was not at home, and his mother seemed to think the journey up the river was much like venturing into the enemy's camp; but she was finally induced to give a reluctant assent, although predicting that all

manner of evil would follow them during their work because of inexperience.

Lloyd had applied directly to his father for permission, and been forced to tell so much as they knew of the plot, whereat Master Dacre, understanding now that there was really something serious on hand, agreed that his son might be absent from home, but at the same time cautioned him against obeying the commands of the conspirators until he was firmly convinced no serious harm could result therefrom.

The fact that General Putnam had detailed the soldier, Paul Stubbs, allowing him to put off his uniform lest attention should be attracted to him, was to the boys greater evidence that they were engaged in an important duty than anything that had been learned.

Lloyd, naturally suspicious of every person and everything around him, was doubly so at this time when they were fairly embarked in the enterprise, and as the boy walked toward

the rendezvous he discussed this detail or that as if to find proofs that Billings and Giles Smart were in some way playing them false.

“It doesn't seem possible that in a matter like this, which will bring the leaders to the gallows once it is made known, recruits or conspirators, whichever you may call them, can be taken on without more ceremony than has been shown toward you and I,” he said thoughtfully, and Dennys was of much the same opinion, therefore there could be no controversy. “It stands to reason they have need to fear betrayal, and yet we are allowed to join them with no guarantee as to our good faith, while at the same time it is known that your father has ever been a staunch supporter of the cause.”

“All you have said is true, and yet were they overparticular as to recruits it might be difficult to find those willing to undertake such a wicked piece of business who could give a guarantee.”

“Yet Master Matthews, the mayor of the city as he is, must have sufficient care for his own neck, if not his reputation, to make sure spies do not join the ranks.”

“It is useless for us to discuss such matter, Lloyd, now that we have really begun the work and it is too late to draw back. They have shown a certain degree of caution in insisting that we give some proof of our faithfulness to the plot, and I fail to understand that we need borrow trouble because more is not required. If this vile conspiracy is conducted in a slipshod manner, so much the better for us who hope to win renown by revealing it.”

Lloyd was not satisfied to let the matter drop at this; but continued to discuss what he termed the imprudence of the plotters until they were arrived so near Whitehall Slip that it was no longer safe to indulge in such conversation.

Having come to the rendezvous they saw

Caleb Billings apparently busy with some work on the boat; but Master Smart was not to be seen.

In his stead, as it were, talking earnestly with Billings, was one in the uniform of General Washington's Guards, and because of what was already known the boys doubted not but that he also was a conspirator, even though those men whose duty it was to protect the commander-in-chief were supposed to be beyond reproach.

The boatman nodded to them familiarly as they approached, and when the two boys were come close by his side, said by way of introduction as he motioned his hand toward the stranger:

“This be Thomas Hickey of the Guard, and he it is who will give you instructions as to what shall be done this day.”

The soldier was not prepossessing in appearance; a low-browed, square-jawed fellow, whose

face was not calculated to inspire confidence, and who wore the air of a bully.

He surveyed the boys from head to foot, in almost an insolent fashion, and when the scrutiny was finished to his satisfaction, asked their names, age and various other questions, much as had Master Smart, to all of which Lloyd and Dennys returned proper replies, concealing nothing and making no pretence of being eager to share in the plot.

“You know what is on foot?” Hickey said abruptly, after having gathered as much information as seemed to him necessary concerning the lads.

“We do not,” Dennys replied emphatically.

“How is that?” and Hickey turned toward the boatman. “I understood they were somewhat informed.”

“From all which was said I allowed they had a smattering of the plan; leastways that was the drift of their talk.”

“How much do you know?” Hickey demanded.

“Nothing, so to speak,” Dennys replied. “We heard that gold was to be had for the seeking, and understood that the good of the colonies demanded a change in the army, which was to be brought about in some fashion; that is all.”

“How do I know that we may trust you with this message to West Point?” Hickey asked sharply.

“If you have not decided that question already we can hardly be expected to answer it for you,” Lloyd said with somewhat of spirit in his tone. “We did not seek the mission; but was told that if we performed it satisfactorily, it would open the way for more important matters. It is not our desire to play the part of messengers, nor have we any great cravings for the privilege of pulling a boat from here to West Point, therefore this portion

of the business can easily be dropped if our appearance is not to your liking."

"The affair in which we are engaged is an important one," Hickey said as if he would give the lads to understand that he was one high in authority among the conspirators, "and it is not well that we take as helpers those who may play us false."

"There is no reason why we should be accepted," Dennys said in what he intended to be in a careless tone. "If there be any hesitation or difficulty about our joining whatsoever you may have in hand, a word is sufficient, and we will go away."

"But we would have two that may safely engage, and yet caution is necessary. Abraham Howland is known to be a friend to the Colonists, and his son might be tempted to reveal much to him that would be of injury to us in our work."

"It stands to reason that there must be some

whom you take upon faith, and yet if I, as the son of my father, be not pleasing to those who have the matter in charge, I can, as we have both said, step back, allowing those who may appear more trustworthy to take my place. Neither my comrade nor myself are here to beg to be received as recruits, Master Hickey, nor do we earnestly desire to make the journey to West Point, therefore say yea or nay, and let us depart, or go home, as shall be decided upon."

"This is not a business in which all the details can be settled upon in an hour or even a day, as you know."

"How may we, when we understand nothing whatever regarding it."

"All that will come in time."

"Yet if there be so much hesitation, perhaps it were well we did not venture, for I would not join myself with any man who dis-trusted me."

“I believe you can count on the lads, Tom,” the boatman said, now making his first attempt to join in the conversation. “Master Smart was of the opinion that they might be true to us, and after this journey it is understood they shall go on board the Duchess of Gordon for a short visit, therefore I pray you forward the mission, for it should be performed ’twixt now and daylight.”

“I am not satisfied with taking as comrades those of whom we know nothing, for this is a business which may cost us dearly if we neglect proper precautions,” Hickey said sharply, and then turning to the boys, added in a more friendly tone, “Here is a letter which you are to deliver, and should there be any tampering with the seal it would cost dearly. Go to the garrison at West Point and ask to see Jacob Chandler, keeping this well hidden meanwhile. When he presents himself say you are come from Thomas Hickey, and do not display the missive

until he asks for it. Await some reply from him, and then return here with all speed."

"Have you anything more to say?" Lloyd asked.

"That is all. Get you gone without delay."

"But when we made effort to embark in this enterprise, whatever it may be, there was in our minds the idea that gold could be won thereby. As yet we have seen none of it, and our only share in the venture appears to be a deal of hard work."

"Do you count on being paid before you have accomplished anything?"

"No, sir, nor are we disposed to carry your message without some assurance that it shall result to our benefit."

"You have already dealt with Master Smart, and he must have satisfied you."

"So he did; but now, as I understand the matter, you are opposed to our being admitted to the enterprise, and it would seem much as if

our journey was in the light of a favor granted us. I am not disposed to ask for money before it has been earned; but at the same time there are two sides to the bargain, and if you object to receiving us as comrades we have good reason to object to playing the part of your messengers."

"I shall agree to whatever may be pleasing in Master Smart's sight, and since he has promised you are to join us, that portion of the business is the same as completed."

"In such case we are satisfied," Lloyd said, and without further parley the two boys set off, leaving the soldier and the boatman in what appeared to be an unfriendly discussion."

"Now I am better pleased," Lloyd said when he and Dennys had gained Broad Street.

"Does it satisfy you that this soldier is disposed to view us with suspicion?"

"Ay, since it shows that the plot is a dangerous one. When Master Smart agreed

almost without argument that we might share in the enterprise, it looked suspicious. This soldier of the Guard is a more cautious man, and not inclined to trust his neck to a halter of our hanging."

"Yet I would rather they looked upon us with favor from the start."

"If everyone who applied was admitted without question, then should I believe that it was of no moment, and I say again it pleases me better that the soldier should be over-prudent rather than careless."

Dennys had put in the inside pocket of his coat the letter Hickey gave him without glancing at the superscription, but now they were so far from Whitehall Slip he considered it safe to look at the missive, and would have taken it out for such purpose but that Lloyd checked him.

"It is not for you to be careless, however much others may err in that regard, for if this

plot be as now seems, our lives are in as great danger as the conspirators, since once they suspected us of playing false, our doom would be sealed."

"I but counted on looking at the super-
scription."

"That can be done when we are on the river, where we know of a surety there are none nearby to spy upon us. If, as you have said, five hundred in this city be ready to commit such a crime as is hinted at, then we may not say whom we can trust."

"It is of no great importance whether I ever see it," Dennys said with a laugh, "therefore it shall be left where it is, so that you may not be ruffled. Now about the boat? Where are we to get one?"

"The man Stubbs said we should embark from nearabout Barclay Street, and most like he will take good care that a craft of some sort be there."

The boys hastened on up Broad Street to Wall, and thence along Broadway until, just before arriving at the Oswego Market, Lloyd bethought himself that they were making no preparations for food during the journey."

"I will go to my home for such provisions as mother may be willing to spare us, and in the meantime do you keep on to meet the soldier, though I recommend that you be extremely careful in talking with him, for it may be Master Hickey has sent some one to spy upon us."

Then Lloyd left his friend as he ran back to Queen Street, and Dennys continued on right cheerily, understanding quite as well as did Lloyd that they were exposed to no little danger while doing this work; but being sanguine as to the result.

At the foot of Barclay Street he saw Stubbs lounging near the water front, as if simply bent on passing the time, and hauled up near at hand was a light skiff.

“Can I borrow yonder boat, friend?” Dennys asked as he went up to the idler, and Stubbs replied carelessly:

“Ay, that you may, if it so be you look well after her on your return,” and he added in a lower tone, “Have you received the mission?”

“We are to deliver a letter to one Jacob Chandler in the garrison at West Point.”

“Where is it?”

“In my pocket.”

“Go over to the boat, and if it so be you can, without too much of a show, lay it in the stern-sheets so that in passing I may get a view of the superscription.”

“There will be no question about our taking the craft?”

“She has been provided for the purpose, and you have simply to leave her here on your return.”

Then Dennys did as he was bidden, throwing his coat down upon the thwart in such

fashion that the letter dropped out, when he disposed of it as Stubbs had requested.

Thanks to this maneuver the soldier readily saw all he desired, and at once took his departure in a leisurely fashion, as if it was of little importance which course he pursued.

Ten minutes later Lloyd arrived, bringing with him a package of such size as gave token that they would not be on short rations of food, even though the journey be prolonged beyond their expectations.

Of the voyage up the river little need be said, because it was without incident.

The boys were forced to labor industriously at the oars, and at intervals they discussed the possibility of their being unable to unearth the plot against General Washington; but as a rule they remained silent, each intent with thoughts that at times were far from pleasant.

Not until nearly sunrise did they arrive at

their destination, thoroughly wearied with the exertions of the night, but since it would be impossible to find the man for whom they sought until a later hour, both laid down on the sand nearby where the boat had been hauled up and slept.

When they awakened the sun was two hours or more high, and they set about making inquiries for Jacob Chandler, finding him half an hour later, and then it was that they received yet further proof of the desperate nature of the enterprise in which Master Smart had thus far appeared as the leading spirit.

When the boys were directed to the soldier whose name they had given, and Dennys said to him that they were come from Thomas Hickey, the man gave evidence of the most extreme alarm.

“What has he sent to me for? Is there not danger enough threatening for us but that he must make my own even greater?”

“He has sent a letter, and we are to await the answer.”

“Where is it?”

“In my pocket.”

“Walk down the road until you are half a mile or more from the camp, and there await me,” Chandler said, looking nervously about, as if fearing some one might have been listening.

“We shall hope you come soon,” Lloyd said, “for we must be on the return sufficiently early to reach New York by nightfall.”

“I will come when it may be safe, and take no chances, however eager you are to get back. It is not of my seeking that Hickey sends messengers into the camp when the slightest word may put me on the gallows.”

“We will do as you have bidden, and remain as long as may seem to us safe,” Lloyd said as he turned to go, motioning for ‘Dennys to follow, and when they were outside the encampment, he whispered, “This man Chandler

seems to have a better idea of what may be the result of such a plot than does Thomas Hickey, and I doubt not but that he would tell all he knew if put under arrest. Did you note how alarmed he was?"

"I should have been blind had I not done so. I am puzzled to understand why these plotters should have striven to find followers in the army. It seems as if their work might have been done with greater safety had they confined it to civilians."

"Most likely they need soldiers, if the capture or murder of General Washington is the object; but that we may not discuss, Dennys, and from this out it would be best, we say, even among ourselves, as little as possible regarding it, lest some one overhear our words."

The boys walked down the road in accordance with Chandler's instructions, each moment growing more and more uncomfortable in mind, for as the crime became more plain to them, so

did the weight of the responsibilities and the dangers which might be incurred increase in their minds.

Not until nearly an hour had passed did Chandler make his appearance, and then, first looking up and down the street to assure himself no one was in sight, he demanded of Dennys the letter.

When it was given him he plunged into the thicket, a short distance away, speaking no word and remaining there hidden from view perhaps half an hour.

As he returned, looking furtively around as if fearing an officer of justice was on his track, he said hurriedly to Dennys :

“Tell Thomas Hickey that, so far as may be, his instructions shall be followed, but up to this moment I have been unable to do anything. Matters here remain as when I last saw him.”

He repeated this twice in order to make cer-

tain the messengers would remember the words, and then hurried away at full speed, as if believing the pursuers were already on his track.

Without comment, but alarmed because of the excessive fear displayed by this man, the boys returned to the river bank, and began the homeward journey, favored now somewhat by the current.

A lumber-laden vessel afforded an opportunity for a tow, and making fast astern, congratulating themselves that the journey would in such wise be speedily performed, the boys spent the remainder of the day right comfortably, since there was no necessity for labor on their part.

It was not yet six o'clock in the afternoon when they pulled the skiff ashore at the foot of Barclay Street, and looked around in vain for signs of Master Stubbs.

He may not have been expecting them so soon; possibly it was hardly supposed they

would bring information of importance, and satisfied they should not see him that night, the lads set off across the city to make report to Caleb Billings.

When they were come to the corner of Nassau and Queen Streets, near the New Dutch Church, they were confronted by no less a personage than Thomas Hickey himself, who had just emerged from a near-by dwelling, clad in the garb of a civilian.

“You have not been overly quick in your journey,” he said in a querulous tone, and Dennys replied somewhat hotly :

“To pull from here to West Point is no slight task, and but for the fact of getting a tow on the return, we should not have arrived until some time to-morrow morning.”

“Did you see you man?”

“Ay, and he has sent you this message.”

Then Dennys repeated what Chandler had said, whereat Hickey appeared vexed, giving

vent to several oaths, and while he was thus displaying his ill-temper, the boys would have walked away but that he detained them.

“Where are you going?” he asked in the tone of one having authority over them.

“Home. It is time we made report to our parents, after so long an absence.”

“Your work is not yet done.”

“We had agreed with Master Smart only to go to West Point and return.”

“It makes no difference what may have been the conversation between you and him; I say the task is not yet performed, and you will come with me to Whitehall Slip, for there is business this night in which you must be concerned.”

“Must is a harsh word, Master Hickey,” Lloyd said angrily. “As yet we have only played the part of messengers, and know no reason why any man may command us.”

“You have the same as embarked in the

enterprise, and therefore are bound to obey orders which may be given by those in authority."

"And are you one of them?" Lloyd asked.

"I have equal power with Master Smart, so far as conducting the affairs is concerned."

"Then it is to you we will say that we do not hold ourselves bounden to any adventure of which we are ignorant. When you have made us acquainted with the purposes of your enterprise, and we are agreed, then shall be the time for you to say we must go here, or there."

"You had best have a care of your words, young sir, or they may lead you into trouble."

"You intend to threaten us?" and now Lloyd's anger was getting the better of him, whereat Dennys pressed his arm as he said in a low tone, but yet sufficiently loud to be heard by Hickey :

"We have the same as bounden ourselves to this business, Lloyd, and if it so be all the par-

particulars are given us, and we have equal advantage with the others, then mayhap it is our place to receive orders from Master Hickey. Let us do as he commands. Where would you have us go, sir?"

"To Whitehall Slip, and, perchance, on board the Duchess of Gordon."

"We will accompany you; but with the understanding that on this night all shall be made plain to us, else we do hold it our privilege to retreat."

"You will know as much as may suffice; but once having heard it, there is no longer time to go backward, for then are you with us, body and soul."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUCHESS OF GORDON.

THE boys were not feeling well content in mind when they followed Thomas Hickey down Nassau Street to Broad, and thence to the Slip.

The tone in which he had spoken and the bearing he now attempted toward them, was that of a master, and but for the end to be attained Lloyd would have risen in revolt against this newly assumed authority, for it was not at all to his liking to be held thus in command by such a man as the soldier appeared to be.

Perhaps he might have mutinied then and there regardless of all that was to be gained,

but for Denny's warning grasp upon his arm, and even as he obeyed the roughly spoken commands there was that on his face which told how deeply such discourteous treatment cut him.

Mayhap it was fortunate that Hickey did not speak during such time as was occupied in walking from the New Dutch Church to Whitehall Slip, where was found Caleb Billings, who appeared to be a fixture in that particular locality for the benefit of the conspirators.

The boatman greeted the boys in a friendly fashion when they were come, asked concerning the journey, whether it had been one of extreme labor, and if they were fatigued, whereat Hickey cried sharply:

"You will attend to your own affairs, Master Billings. It concerns you not if these lads have made a pleasure trip or performed labor. Has Master Smart been here within an hour?"

"Look you, Master Hickey," the boatman

said angrily. "I am not given to taking quietly such words as of late days you choose to bestow upon me. Decent treatment is all I ask, and that I would have were you twice the man you think yourself to be. With a civil tongue in your head we shall continue on in this adventure without much friction; but indulge a bit more in such taking on of authority, and we will have trouble together."

"So you have grown insubordinate before the work is well begun," the soldier cried angrily.

"No man can be in insubordination against his equals, and I consider my part in this adventure to be as great as yours, Thomas Hickey, else would I abandon it."

"Will you tell me whether Master Smart has been here, or must I go elsewhere to inquire?"

"He was here within the hour and left orders for you to wait. Take my advice and occupy the time in keeping your tongue quiet, for the good of your body," Billings said angrily, and

then turning to the boys he repeated his questions as to their journey, whereupon Dennys gave him a brief account of what they had done; but without repeating the message sent by Chandler.

During such time as they were talking Hickey moved a short distance away, pacing to and fro as if it was beneath his dignity to be seen in conversation with the boatman and the lads, and Lloyd, quite as thoroughly disgruntled as was Billings, asked :

“ In this enterprize of yours, whatever it may be, is this soldier much in authority ?”

“ Bless your soul, lad, he is no higher than I, or you, if you join us ; but takes upon himself such lofty airs as if believing it was to his advantage. An ignorant man is dangerous in whatever he undertakes, and I who say it am ignorant myself, although the Lord has given me sufficient common sense to know when I make of myself an unpleasant spectacle.”

“But Hickey has given us direct orders, and insists that if we go into this adventure we shall be under his command.”

“Then I say to you, lads, that Hickey has lied, and will say so to him if he repeats it. With two or three like him, all those who are favorable to the enterprise may drop away, leaving us alone.”

“He commanded that we come here; can you say for what purpose, Master Billings?”

“It is all in a line with what was said to you yesterday by one of the governor’s household. As I understand it, orders were given that you should be taken to the Duchess of Gordon, if it so be you returned safely from the journey and were yet of the mind to join us.”

“Join you in what?” Dennys asked. “It is time we understood the nature of this thing if we are asked to go here and there blindly, putting ourselves under the control of such as Thomas Hickey.”

“True for you, lad, true for you; yet I may not explain. This night, if it so be you go on board the *Duchess of Gordon*, and I see no reason why you should hesitate, all will be made plain. Then it may be you will waver regarding the venture; but I say that it must succeed because of the numbers engaged therein, and once the work has been performed according to the plans laid down by no less a personage than Governor Tryon himself, we shall stand high in the favor of his majesty, which I venture to say is better than being looked upon with favor by the leaders of the ragamuffin army.”

“Then this is a plot against General Washington?” Lloyd incautiously said, whereat the boatman closed his mouth like an oyster and refused to speak further, replying only to such questions as the boys asked.

“You will hear all on board the *Duchess of Gordon*, and it is not for me to make explanations.”

Hickey paid no further attention to these messengers so lately returned from West Point; but continued pacing to and fro in a manner which was well calculated to excite the suspicions of any who might have gotten an inkling of the plot, until Master Giles Smart appeared, pulling up to the land in a boat rowed by eight British sailors.

“You have returned in fair season, young sirs,” he said in a kindly tone, heeding not the fact that Hickey pressed forward as if to gain speech with him before he could address the lads.

“We have come so soon as might be,” Dennys replied courteously. “It was not play to row from here to West Point; but a lumber-laden schooner took our towline coming down, thereby saving us much time.”

“And you saw the man to whom you were sent?”

“Yes, sir, and received in return a message,

which we have already told to Master Hickey according to his commands," Lloyd replied.

"We were further ordered to follow him here, and informed that if we embarked in the enterprise we should be subject to his instructions."

"That which I said I will explain," and Hickey would have urged Master Smart aside but that gentleman refused to move, as he said to the boys :

"Commands and orders must be given in such work as we propose to engage in ; but I assure you that no task shall be laid upon any man save in the spirit of friendliness. Master Hickey is in a position to be of great service, and at a later day you can judge for yourselves why it is so. It is understood, I believe, between us that you are to go on board the ship with me?"

"We are willing to do so, sir," Lloyd replied, "providing we may know well what is

the character of the work in which we are to be engaged.”

“All shall be explained to you in due time, and I beg that differences of opinion shall not arise among those who are aiming toward a common purpose. The worthy Caleb Billings and our good Master Hickey are inclined to measure words which are of no moment; but mayhap serve to mar the harmony of our work. All that will be arranged in due season and in proper order, therefore let it not disturb you.”

Having said this and with the air of one who would soothe any feelings which may have been ruffled, Master Smart turned in the manner of a diplomat to the impatient soldier, and in words which could not be overheard evidently spoke him as fairly as he did the boys.

When perhaps ten minutes had elapsed, during which time the boat with its crew remained at the landing ready to push off, Master Smart engaged the soldier in conversation,

and then, turning again to the boys, he said :

“If it please you to do as I have proposed, we will now embark.”

It was nightfall, and by this venturing on board the armed ship the amateur spies would be prevented from reaching their homes until perhaps the following morning ; but yet they made no hesitation, for now it seemed had come the time when they might learn that which it was most important should be known, and Lloyd stepped into the boat, immediately followed by Dennys, who most earnestly desired to speak a word in private with him, but dared not, because no such conversation could be indulged in while so many were around.

Much to the satisfaction of both the lads, they observed that Thomas Hickey remained on shore, and Master Smart did not join them until he had evidently soothed the ruffled feathers of this overbearing soldier and per-

formed the same office for the boatman, leaving the two standing in apparent friendliness side by side as he stepped into the boat.

Then the sailors pushed off, and in the gloom none could have recognized them once they were in the stream.

There was in Dennys' mind the disquieting thought that now were they wholly in the power of the conspirators, and at the least incautious word or move from them death might, and probably would, follow.

It was not pleasant to dwell upon such facts; but yet the lads knew when they made the proposition to General Putnam that exceeding great danger was to be incurred, and if either felt timorous at this time he forced it down as best he might in the effort to appear calm and unconcerned, as became those who would plot against the welfare of the country.

During the time occupied in rowing from Whitehall Slip to the ship, Master Smart spoke

with the lads on indifferent topics, as if there was in his mind no more than the general gossip of the day; but through it all he appeared exceedingly friendly, and gave the boys to understand that he was pleased because they would join in the enterprise which as yet he had not proposed. Very soon the boat was made fast alongside the Duchess of Gordon. Lloyd and Dennys went up the ladder in compliance with Master Smart's gesture, and by him were conducted immediately to the after-cabin where they found, seated at a table which was strewn with papers, the gentleman whom they had seen exercising the rights of the colony of Massachusetts by virtue of his permission from the king.

Both had observed Governor Tryon many times as he drove through the city, and there was little need Master Smart should announce in loud tones his excellency, the governor.

The boys made their best bow, which was

answered by the king's official with a careless nod, as he asked of Master Smart :

“ Who be these, Giles, and why have you brought them here ?”

“ One is the son of that Abraham Howland of whom your excellency has heard, and the other is young Dacre, whose father is a merchant in the city. Learning that the king's gold is to be gained by embarking in a certain enterprise they have presented themselves, and already performed a certain service. It was to their minds that some assurance should be given as to the reward which might come when the work was done. I ventured to propose Master Matthews, the mayor ; but afterward thought best to bring them direct to you.”

“ What would they have of me ?”

Giles Smart looked at the boys as if to say they should answer the question, and the two lads exchanged glances, after which Lloyd said courteously :

“We partly promised ourselves an adventure of which as yet we know but little, and, as Master Smart has been so kind as to say, have already performed a certain work, which in itself was nothing. It matters not who our fathers may be, for even though we are but boys Dennys and I feel equal to the labor of men. Now we are minded to do that which will win for us renown, perchance, the favor of those high in authority, it may be, and somewhat of gold; but first, with all due respect, your excellency, we would know what it is we shall be called upon to do.”

“Why could you not have explained all this to them, Giles?” the governor said, hardly glancing at the lads.

“Because, your excellency, it seemed to me that they demanded some assurance from one higher in authority than I.”

“All they desire to know can be told by you, and I will say this for their satisfaction, if it

must be : That whatever you may tell them I stand to, and since money appears to be the bait which has drawn them on, let sufficient be given them as assurance of more to follow."

Having said this the governor turned once more to the papers in front of him, as if intimating that the interview was at an end, and Master Smart motioned for the boys to follow him on deck.

"His excellency is overrun with business; matters of greatest importance to the state now, since those of the colonies are rising in rebellion against the commands of our gracious king, and it is as well that I explain to you what seems necessary should be made known."

He paused as if for reply, and Lloyd said:

"Since we have seen him, and know that he guarantees your word, all is well. Surely you cannot blame us, Master Smart, for wishing to know what might be expected of us. Those who rush in blindfold on an adventure may

not be relied upon when the time of danger comes.”

“It is bravely said, lad, and pleases me better than if you were ready to pledge yourselves ignorantly. Come to my cabin, which, although small, will afford us sufficient accommodation for a private conversation.”

Having thus spoken he led the way to the second cabin, and there entered a small berth, in which were two bunks, a couple of stools, and a desk.

Here, summoning a servant, he ordered that refreshments be brought, and explained his reason for doing so by saying :

“After the labor which you lads have performed, I doubt not but that something in the way of food will be welcome. Eat heartily, and while you are satisfying both hunger and thirst, it shall be my task to make plain that which is for the benefit of this colony, and to the pleasure of his majesty, the king.”



Master Smart made plain the crime proposed by Governor William Tryon.
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Some cold meat, ale and bread were brought, whereupon the boys set about making as hearty a meal as if they had been in the house of a friend, and while they ate Master Smart, with many a word of explanation as to why this plot should be shared in by those who loved their homes, made plain the crime proposed by Governor William Tryon, who, as he then declared, was aided and abetted by no less than the mayor of the city.

To attempt to give all this in his words would require much too long in the telling, because of the many arguments he used to show why two lads like Lloyd and Dennys should embark in the venture on account of their loyalty to the colony; but in substance the wickedness he would have them take part in was something like this:

It was proposed, and he stated that no less than six hundred had already been enlisted in the plot, that upon the arrival of the British

forces General Washington should be made a prisoner and delivered to Sir William Howe.

This was what the boys expected to hear; yet at the same time they found it difficult to preserve a calm demeanor while Master Smart unraveled the diabolical plan.

He went into details by explaining that at the moment General Washington's person was seized the magazine would be blown up, for there were those in the army in a position to compass such an act who had already agreed to join the conspiracy, and during the confusion the plotters should secure the entrances to the town, capture such of the general officers as might readily be taken, and thus at one blow have possession, not only of the city, but the chief strength of the force.

"Once General Washington and certain prominent officers are in our power," Master Smart said, lingering long over the words like one who rolls a sweet morsel under his tongue,

“we have the troops at our command, and there is no doubt but that if the plans be laid properly and carried out faithfully, the Continentals will surrender within an hour after the magazine has been destroyed. In fact there will be nothing else left for them to do, and by thus joining the venture, which cannot miscarry, you lads, may win such gratitude from the king as will be the making of your fortunes. By one stroke you can advance to higher stations than would fall to your lot did you serve the ragamuffin Continentals a long lifetime, even should they hold together. It is positive, however, that these handfuls of imitation soldiers cannot maintain their own against his majesty’s troops, and at the best this rebellion must be crushed within a year. By joining us you have everything to gain and nothing to lose, while the reverse must be the case should you hold to the mistaken belief of your fathers.”

It may well be supposed that a man like Master Smart could paint in the most favorable colors this wondrously wicked plot, else he would not have been trusted by Governor Tryon to raise recruits, and had the boys wavered in their purpose, it is more than likely his specious words would have been believed.

However, determined as they were to pretend an adherence to the scheme, in order that they might frustrate the design, it can readily be understood that they gave willing ear to all he said, and when he was done appeared ready to engage in the enterprise.

“It strikes you well?” he asked. “And it surely should, for he who sets out to win a fortune where the odds are in his favor is already assured of gaining the purpose.”

“There is little in it which we had not imagined from what had been heard,” Lloyd said, careful now lest he betray himself, for his

head was in a whirl because of the wickedness which would be done and the knowledge of the risk they were running in thus venturing to expose the plot.

Should they be suspected, after having embarked in the scheme, wherein were, as Master Smart had said, no less than six hundred engaged, their lives would pay the forfeit without the formality of a trial; and the slightest slip of the tongue would prove their undoing.

“Then we may count on you as being with us, since I promise in the name of his excellency, Governor Tryon, that you shall be richly rewarded for doing whatever part may be assigned you?”

“You may count us with you,” Lloyd said gravely.

“Then you will have no hesitation in swearing not to reveal any word which I spoke. This oath should have been required of you before

any disclosure was made; but I heeded not the precaution, believing you to be young gentlemen who would hold to what was implied."

The boys had not expected to make solemn oath to keep secret what had been divulged; but yet to refuse now would be to betray themselves, and there was no possible way out of what appeared to be a difficulty save by doing as the governor's tool requested.

"We will give our oaths," Dennys said, and straightway Master Smart administered in the most solemn fashion this obligation which bound them to strenuous secrecy and faithful obedience to the commands of those who had charge of the nefarious business.

They had long since cease to eat, and once this solemn pledge of their words had been given, Lloyd suggested that now it was time for them to return to their homes.

"We have been absent since yesterday noon," he said, "and can hardly hope to be with our

parents before midnight even though we start now."

"Why should you go to-night?" Master Smart asked as if in surprise.

"Because it was expected we would return some time to-day, and may cause us trouble in the answering if we are longer delayed."

"Wait you here until I learn his excellency's pleasure," Master Smart said as he rose to his feet, and on leaving the room the boys were startled by hearing the click of the key in the lock.

"He has made us prisoners," Dennys said in alarm, and Lloyd, none the less excited, but holding himself better in control, replied quietly :

"Perhaps after having solemnly pledged ourselves to the enterprise, he has the right; but it appears to me much as if such treatment was ungenerous."

This was said with the knowledge that there

might be those who were listening to every word, and the boys gazed at each other in anxiety, questioning by their eyes if danger might not menace even at this moment when they had agreed to join the plot.

It seemed strange that they, being on the ship, unable to leave it without permission, should be thus confined in narrow quarters, for Master Smart had simply gone to consult with Governor Tryon.

Yet why had all this matter been explained to them, if there was any question as to their fidelity?

This thought was in the minds of both the boys, and after a pause of a few seconds Dennys whispered, drawing so near his comrade that the words could not by any chance have been heard, even though the tiny cabin had another occupant:

“We need have no fear, Lloyd, else he had not told us all he did. It is but a precaution,

and in such work as they are engaged it is well that they suspect everyone."

"Yet I like not this treatment, and have no care as to who may hear me," Lloyd said, speaking stoutly, regardless of the possibility that his words would be overheard. "If we can be trusted with the secret, we surely may be allowed our liberty, else why did they confide in us?"

Dennys, fearful lest some one had been stationed outside to listen to their conversation, made nervous gestures to his comrade, signifying that he remain quiet; but Lloyd gave no heed as he continued to cry out against such "treachery," as he called it, until the turning of the key in the lock told of the coming of a visitor.

It was Master Smart who appeared in the doorway, and no one could be more friendly than he, as he said courteously:

"I have to implore your pardon for my seem-

ing to lack confidence. I made you prisoners simply that you might not be seen by certain persons on board, for there are here some citizens of New York who would be greatly alarmed had you suddenly opened the door as they passed. You may well fancy how dangerous is this enterprise, and those who engage in it must have a care for their safety."

CHAPTER V.

PAUL STUBBS.

WHEN Master Smart mentioned the fact that there were several citizens of New York on board who would not be pleased at being seen, both the boys understood that it might be much to the advantage of the leaders in the American cause if these traitors could be known; but just at that moment it was impossible for them to do anything toward making such a discovery.

Master Smart had locked them into his cabin lest they should inadvertently come upon these traitorous ones, and it was not likely he would now be willing they should look about in search for their fellow conspirators.

However angry Lloyd might be because they

were temporarily made prisoners, he could not refuse to accept the implied apology in Master Smart's words, and thus, apparently, were friendly feelings once more restored.

Judging from the precautions taken when they were conducted from this cabin into the saloon, the boys believed there were many influential citizens on board, otherwise Master Smart would not have been so careful to prevent them from seeing or being seen.

He led them out through the forward entrance of the second saloon, sending word in advance by one of the sailors who had apparently been stationed near the door of his room, and thanks to such precautions, so the boys believed, the decks were apparently clear when they marched into the outer air.

Outside the crew of the ship there was but one person to be seen, and both Lloyd and Dennys recognized him as Master Gilbert Forbes, the gunsmith on Broadway, who had

ever been noted for his devotion to the cause of liberty.

That he knew the lads, or at least one of them, was certain from his start of surprise on seeing them, and positive it is that his astonishment could not have been greater than that experienced by Lloyd and Dennys, for this man, who had enjoyed the reputation of being a thorough patriot, could have come on board the *Duchess of Gordon* only to plot against the welfare of the colony, and the life of the commander-in-chief.

Master Smart observed that the boys recognized the gunsmith, saying with a laugh :

“ I did not intend you should see any of our visitors, but since you have met one, and evidently know him, it is good proof, so far as you are concerned, that there be many among us who are of weight in the city ; that we need not enlist lads save there is work which they mayhap can do better than their elders.”

“And it is for such reason that you have allowed us to join in the venture?” Lloyd said.

“Ay, for surely you must understand that we had a motive, otherwise why would we admit those so young as you?”

“But what is the especial task which we seem fitted to perform, according to your ideas?”

“Much in the same line as that you have already done. During the next week we would send here and there on important missions, and lads like you will be less likely to excite suspicion than if such a one as Master Forbes or Master Matthews were to be journeying abroad in hot haste.”

“Is the time so near at hand?” Dennys asked.

“It cannot long be delayed, since the blow must be struck on or near the time of the arrival of the king’s forces, if we would be able to hold our advantage.”

During this conversation they were proceed-

ing from the companionway of the second cabin to the rail, and having arrived there near the ladder, at the foot of which was in waiting a boat, Master Smart halted.

“It would seem that we are to go ashore now?” Dennys said with a laugh which had in it little of mirth.

“Ay, there is no reason why you should linger, and as you have already said, it may be necessary to report to your parents. We would not do anything that might excite suspicion, and there is no need for you to remain here after having embarked in the enterprise.”

“Then our services are required no more?”

“On the contrary we shall expect a great deal of you during the next eight or ten days, and that there may be no delay you will spend so much of your time as may be possible in the company of Caleb Billings, the boatman.”

“Beginning to-morrow morning?” Lloyd asked.

“Save when you may have been sent on a mission, we expect you will remain within call of him during all the hours of daylight, and as you perform the work with which we intrust you, so shall be the reward when our task shall have come to an end. Bear well in mind that the king will not forget those who are faithful to him, and what you accomplish within the next few days may determine all the remainder of your lives.”

“It surely would if we were taken in custody on the charge of conspiring against the liberty and life of General Washington,” Lloyd suggested, and Master Smart said as if the idea was disagreeable to him:

“Put such fears far from your mind, for there is no danger they will be realized so long as you remain true to the undertaking.”

“That is to say,” Lloyd answered with a faint smile, “if all others are equally true; but among six hundred there may be some who are

cowardly, like unto the one we met at West Point, in which case danger menaces all."

"We have been careful in our selection, and I have the utmost confidence in every person who has thus far agreed to the venture; but why did you speak of the man to whom you were sent?"

"Because he was in dire distress lest some one should suspect why we had come, and acted in every way other than like a brave man."

"You can well imagine that one in his position should be apprehensive, looking in every quarter for danger, even though there may be no reason for fear. He and Thomas Hickey are not alone among the number of our adherents who are at present in the Continental Army."

At this moment there was a movement aft as if a number of persons were ascending the companionway from the after-cabin, and Master Smart said hurriedly :

“Here is the boat which will take you back to the city, and there is no reason for further delay. I shall be on shore shortly after daylight, and will hold further converse with you.”

There was no excuse for loitering, even though the boys had been minded to remain longer, which they were not, and a few moments later both were in the stern sheets of the eight-oared gig, being rowed rapidly toward the Battery.

As a matter of course they did not dare to indulge in conversation during this voyage, and on landing Caleb Billings met them, grasping each by the hand warmly as he asked:

“Were you satisfied with your visit?”

“So far as one may be who learns how much danger menaces him.”

“That is less than you now believe,” the boatman replied confidently. “’Twixt now and this day week our numbers will be doubled, if not trebled, and with such a following there

can be no hinderance to the plans. I am thinking you have need to get home quickly, else the watch may make disagreeable inquiries, for it is now well on to nine o'clock."

"We have no desire to loiter on the way," Dennys said with a laugh, which was checked an instant later as Thomas Hickey, gloomy, and with an air of undue importance, approached them.

"I shall see you to-morrow morning?" Caleb Billings said interrogatively, and Lloyd replied:

"Of a surety. We have promised to be here as soon after daylight as may be possible."

"Where are you going now?" Hickey asked in the tone of one who has the right to demand an answer, and Dennys, fearing lest Lloyd should speak intemperately, said quickly:

"To our homes, and surely we have need of rest, inasmuch as we rowed steadily every hour of last night."

"See to it that you are at your stations in

the morning. It is reasonable to suppose that all has been explained since you went on board the ship, and by this time you can understand how much depends upon each person doing his full duty."

"It needs not you to remind us," Lloyd replied angrily. "In all that we heard on board the Duchess of Gordon no mention was made of your being in command over those who might embark in the adventure, otherwise had we remained aloof."

"It is well that you guard your tongue, young sir, both as to keeping secrets and replying to your elders, for impudence and sincerity of purpose go not hand in hand."

Dennys pressed his companion's arm once more as a sign that he should keep a check upon his temper, for no good might come of defying this man who took upon himself so much authority; but Lloyd was not to be kept silent, and said, as the two moved quickly away:

“When we have need of advice, Master Hickey, and are willing to come to you for it, then will be the time you may give it us; but at present we have received all that is needed from those who are seemingly high in authority.”

As he said this Lloyd hurried away as if fearing the soldier might follow, and when they were some considerable distance from the slip, Dennys expostulated with his comrade for such free speaking.

“It is not for us to make enemies just at this time,” he said quietly but firmly. “We are like to see all of danger that we may desire without breeding enemies among those who are in the plot. I distrust that fellow, Hickey, and believe he would, to gratify his own passions, do one an injury, even though by such act he imperiled his secret and his life.”

“Providing I was engaged in this crime for the purpose of carrying it out to the end, I

would not consort with such as he, neither should I allow him to lord it over me."

"But surely in order to accomplish our ends you can overlook much that he says, for if this work be continued the gallows will be the spot on which he quits this life."

"If there be six hundred engaged in the plot, he will not lack for companions at such a time."

"I have no doubt——"

Dennys ceased speaking very suddenly as a man stepped out from amid the gloom of the alleyway directly in front of them, thereby causing both to come to a halt in order to avoid a collision.

"You should be more careful of your movements, sir, else are you like to receive an injury," Lloyd said, as with difficulty he checked his headway in time to save coming into contact with the stranger, and an instant later he recognized, even in the darkness, the soldier from General Putnam's headquarters—Paul Stubbs.

“I failed to meet you when you came down the river; but arrived at Whitehall Slip just as Governor Tryon’s emissary was conducting you down the harbor, therefore I waited, for surely there must be news of some sort.”

The three had come to a halt as Stubbs began speaking, and Dennys replied in a tone which was incautiously loud:

“We have learned very much of what we set about, although as yet can name but few who are engaged in the plot.”

Then he repeated that which had been told them by Master Smart, and when he was come to an end of the recital, the soldier, who gave evidence of being thoroughly astonished, as well as horrified, exclaimed:

“It hardly seems possible any who love the Colonies could embark in such a fiendish plot.”

“Surely the soldier, Thomas Hickey, must have professed to be true to the Cause, else he would not be one of General Washington’s

Guards, and he would make himself to appear as if having much authority in the matter," Lloyd said. "We saw on board the Duchess of Gordon Master Gilbert Forbes, the gunsmith, and understood that he was among the conspirators; then there is a soldier, named Chandler, at West Point, who has evidently agreed to aid in the crime. It is true, Master Stubbs, there be many in this city whom you believe devoted to the colony that stand ready to commit this great wickedness."

"It is strange that two lads like you should have been the first to give the alarm, and I would that I stood in your shoes when, the plotters having been foiled, you are rewarded."

"It would seem as if our work was not yet done," Dennys said gravely, "and before the end shall come we may not be in condition to receive reward or hear words of praise."

"Nay, nay, my lad, you must not let your fears get the better of you. So far have you

two done bravely, and I make no question but that the work will be continued in equally good fashion until the criminals are made prisoners. I go now to report, and if it so be the general would give instructions, will come before the morning to your homes."

Then he inquired particularly where each of the boys lived, and having gained such information, hastened up King Street, while they continued on to Crown.

The meeting with this friend had done much toward arousing Dennys from the gloomy forebodings which began to creep over him as he left the Duchess of Gordon, and for the moment the adventure in which they had embarked appeared less dangerous than at any time since having had speech with General Putnam.

"If all this is to be done within a week or ten days, as Master Smart suggested, it would surely seem as if we might play our part well, however timorous we are grown," he said to

Lloyd, and the words had been hardly more than uttered when both boys were seized roughly by the shoulders.

Worn with much labor, and excited by all that had been said to them, they were in a highly nervous condition at thus being unexpectedly and unceremoniously halted, and involuntarily gave vent to a cry of alarm.

Whatsoever of fear may have come into their hearts with this sudden interruption, was as nothing compared with what they felt on turning and seeing Thomas Hickey looking down upon them with menace in every movement.

“So!” he exclaimed. “I was not at fault when I questioned whether we might be wise in allowing you to join us without other guarantee than your words. It is two lads who propose in their ignorance to overthrow the plans of their elders and betters, is it?”

Thus suddenly and unexpectedly had come the moment of greatest danger for these boys



Smart and Lloyd were seized roughly by the shoulders.—Page 118.

who voluntarily took upon themselves the part of spies.

Both realized at the instant all that might be the result of this fellow's charges against them, and, perchance had he heard their conversation with Stubbs, any hesitation on their part would make of his suspicions a certainty.

As a matter of course if he knew what had passed between them and the soldier from General Putnam's headquarters, then all was lost indeed, and they might look for little mercy; but Lloyd had sufficient self-possession to make at least one attempt toward throwing this fellow off the scent.

"Your words are as objectionable now as they were before we went on board the Duchess of Gordon," he said with an assumption of anger which covered his fear for the time being.

"I can well fancy that when two spies are overtaken in their dirty work, the words of honest men are unpleasant to their ears."

“I know not whom you may call spies,” Lloyd said bravely, “but surely we who have embarked in the adventure are honest as compared to you who have foresworn yourself, since you must have taken the oath to the colonies when you joined the Continental army.”

“What I may or may not have done is of little importance to you, now that you are convicted of having joined us in order to betray our purpose.”

“What right have you to say that?” Dennys asked, gathering courage.

“Who was that man that just left you?”

“A friend of ours. Surely we do not give up the right to speak with an acquaintance on the street? And even though we had, you have no authority to question us.”

“The one who just left you is a private on duty at General Putnam’s headquarters—I fail to remember his name at the moment. He

met you for the sake of learning all that you heard on board the ship."

"That is an assertion which you are making without any foundation. Our friend is a soldier, although where he may be stationed I cannot say; but we knew him before we were so unfortunate as to fall into your company."

"Do all the soldiers of your acquaintance move about without uniforms?"

"It would seem so, since both you and he are in civilian's garb."

"There is no reason why I should bandy words with you longer," Hickey cried in a rage. "It is positive you have joined this movement simply for the purpose of playing the part of spies; but, fortunately, my distrust has been the means of saving the lives perchance of many good men. You will come with me, and at the least show of resistance, it is my intention to kill rather than take the chances of your escape."

“Indeed we shall do nothing of the kind,” Lloyd cried loudly, hoping his voice might be heard by some belated pedestrian, or perhaps by the members of the watch. “We have but just come from an interview with your betters, and are not minded to take orders from you, since Master Smart himself declared you were without authority.”

“Any man is in authority who discovers such as you. It is to be a choice between death and obeying my commands. I shall not hesitate to kill, for by so doing I am but saving my own life.”

Although the boys did their best to appear calm and to simulate anger rather than fear, they were most woefully frightened.

Hickey having seen them in conversation with Stubbs, and perhaps overhearing ever so little of their words, had good and sufficient proof of their insincerity. Knowing how desperately wicked was the plot, they could not

fail to understand that their lives would be counted as nothing if they should appear to stand in the way of a successful ending of the conspiracy.

Even Hickey would be warranted in striking them down, because he more than others, save perhaps Chandler, was in danger in the Continental Army, and it was surprising that he forebore at a moment when all might have been ended, so far as they two were concerned, without overly-much peril to himself.

Doubtless it was his arrogance and desire to appear of great importance in the eyes of his associates that determined him in taking the lads where they might be seen by others in the plot, else had he killed them there.

“You will follow me, and without further word,” he said, drawing from inside his coat a long-bladed, keen-edged knife. “I am disposed that my betters, as you call them, shall pass sentence upon you, rather than inflict pun-

ishment on my own responsibility ; but yet if you make any delay whatsoever, or raise your voice in outcry, then will I deal the blow which shall silence your tongues forever."

There was no mistaking the man's purpose.

Both Lloyd and Dennys understood that he would do exactly as he had threatened, and while seeing no hope for themselves they were not willing to yield up their lives to do his bidding.

Terrified though Lloyd was he did not intend, if it should be possible to control himself, that this man should have the satisfaction of hearing them sue for mercy, and he said stoutly :

"Neither you nor any man can prove us guilty of being spies ; but yet we shall follow as you say, because it seems that we are fallen into evil hands, and it would indeed be death to refuse ; but mark me well, Master Hickey, that once we are come to where I shall have

speech with Master Smart, then shall you be brought to an understanding of your proper position. We were minded to withdraw from the business because of your arrogance, and should have done so except that we were told you had no more authority in this business than Caleb Billings. Now you threaten to murder us, and because of such threats we are forced to obey your orders; but you shall suffer for it, and that before the morning comes."

It is not possible to say how much effect this able speech had upon the traitorous guardsman; but certain it is that Dennys was wondrously relieved in mind by hearing his comrade thus assert himself, and he made haste to add:

"When we agreed to cast our lot among such as Governor Tryon, Master Matthews, Master Smart and the gunsmith Forbes, it was with the idea that, although engaged in what some would call a treasonable enterprise, we were among those who at least had gentlemanly in-

instincts, instead of which we find ourselves comrades with a bully and would-be murderer."

"If I hadn't caught you red-handed, so to speak, in the very act of giving information of what you have learned this night, to the enemy, then might your words nettle me; but now they have no effect, for I know that between this hour and sunrise you will have gone out of this world, although not in so disgraceful a fashion as is usually accorded spies. Move on and see to it that you loiter not."

As he said this Hickey prodded the boys with the point of his knife, causing them no slight degree of pain, and they believing beyond peradventure that he would not hesitate at taking their lives, obeyed his orders, their hearts growing heavier and heavier as they retraced their steps toward Whitehall Slip, until it was as if they could not advance one foot before the other, for of a surety it seemed that they were absolutely going to their death.

CHAPTER VI.

PRISONERS.

THE boys understood full well how imminent was the danger which menaced at this moment.

Hickey was not the only one who would clamor for their lives when it should be known that they had been talking with a soldier from General Putnam's headquarters. The natural supposition would be that they had betrayed the conspiracy, unless, as came into Lloyd's mind while they were being driven like cattle before the arrogant soldier, they might perchance make it appear as if they were winning Stubbs over to the plot.

This fellow had shown himself to be quick-witted, and the two had no doubt but that he

would suspect the true condition of affairs, if it should be possible for them to have speech with him.

In repeating to Stubbs what had been told them on board the *Duchess of Gordon*, in order that he might carry the information to General Putnam, the boys had deliberately broken their oaths taken before Master Smart.

Under ordinary circumstances this would have appeared to them a most flagrant crime, "for he who has foresworn himself no longer can claim even so much as the acquaintance of honorable men."

In this case, however, the "end justified the means," and at the time they repeated to Paul Stubbs what they had learned on board the *Duchess of Gordon*, neither felt any convictions about so doing, because it was to save the commander-in-chief from captivity, if not death, and perhaps prevent the cause of freedom from being absolutely crushed.

Now, however, when, unless some unexpected accident or circumstance should arise within a few hours, death was very near to them, both regretted deeply that their last act should have been in a certain degree a false one, although neither would have changed the situation had it been possible.

The two preceded Thomas Hickey in silence. It was impossible for them to hold any private conversation, and surely there was nothing which they wished to say to this brutal captor.

Now that it was come so late, the streets were nearly deserted, and they saw no person to whom they might appeal for help until they were returned to Whitehall Slip, where Caleb Billings yet remained, and even in their extreme danger Dennys questioned in his mind as to whether this boatman was on duty day and night in his efforts to aid the murderous plot.

“What is the meaning of this?” the boatman asked, as the soldier and his prisoners came up. “I thought you lads had gone home.”

“They would be there but for me,” Hickey said, in a consequential tone. “I have discovered that they are spies, and ’twixt now and daylight they shall receive the punishment due to spies. I would that there were something worse than death, for such a crime cannot be expiated simply by the loss of their lives.”

“Tut, tut, man; you are out of your head. Too much brooding over the future has weakened your brain. I know who these lads are, and can answer for it as well as one man can for another that they be not spies.”

“But I tell you they are. It is hardly ten minutes since I saw them holding private conversation with a soldier from Putnam’s headquarters, whose face I well remember.”

“And is it forbidden that if we embark in this enterprise we shall no longer speak to those

whom we know?" Lloyd asked boldly, encouraged by the friendliness which the boatman exhibited toward them.

"It is not permitted you shall come straight from having been admitted to our secrets and repeat them to those against whom we work."

"Know you of a surety that they have done this thing?" Billings asked, now coming to understand fully the gravity of the situation.

"Ay, that I do."

"It is a lie, Master Billings. He knows nothing of the kind!" Dennys cried. "We stopped to speak with an acquaintance who met us on our way home. He came up after we had left him and accused us of having betrayed the secret. He has no knowledge on the subject, it is simply his suspicions."

"All that is true," Lloyd added. "We but spoke to Paul Stubbs, as was necessary when he accosted us, and perchance lingered a little long in the conversation, for there came into my

mind the thought that he might become one of us if properly approached. This man who takes upon himself to manage affairs which are in charge of his betters, heard not a word that was said, but pounced upon us with the word 'spy' in his mouth, and immediately threatened us with death. Even now the blood is running down our backs where he has prodded us with his knife."

"Is this true?" Billings asked, now in a threatening tone.

"Ay, that it is," Dennys cried, whipping off his coat to show even in the darkness the crimson stains upon his shirt. "If such be the comrades with whom we are asked to work, it is time we presented ourselves once more to Master Smart, insisting on being released from the obligations which we entered into."

"Hark you, lads. This soldier who takes upon himself to question the commands of those in authority is no more in this business



“Master Hickey,” Billings cried angrily, “dare use the word spy to me, and I will settle accounts here.”—Page 133.

than am I, and you may be certain he shall not work his will upon you while I stand by."

During this latter portion of the conversation Hickey stood directly behind the boys, knife in hand, ready to check a possible flight, and when the boatman thus announced his purpose, he said vindictively :

"If you choose to assume the sins of these young spies, then will there be another who suffers death this night, for I shall take all three in charge."

"As to that there may be a question," Master Hickey," Billings cried angrily. "It is not as safe to threaten me as it is two lads who have but just proved their willingness to aid us by making a long and tedious journey. Dare use the word spy to me, and you and I will settle accounts here, or if that be impossible, I will fling everything upon the hazard, but that you shall be checked in thus assuming authority."

"What mean you by such threat?" and now

the soldier turned furiously upon the boatman.

“All which you can make the words imply. I did not stake my life in this business to be set upon by such as you, or, in fact, by any one; but bound myself as a comrade with those who would do the king’s will. That you are a soldier in the Guard gives you no right to dictate to me, or any one else, and the slightest hint to your officers will put you out of the way to do a mischief.”

“Now you are threatening to break your oath, and such words as that by agreement to which we have subscribed, may be punished with death!” Hickey cried, speaking indistinctly because of the rage which consumed him.

“You are overfond of prating about bloodshed,” Billings retorted in less anger than his fellow-conspirator, and while the boys failed to understand how this quarrel might work to their advantage, they knew of a surety it had

gone so far that they need no longer fear what the Guardsman might do.

The only danger which now threatened them was that Hickey could persuade such as Master Smart to have faith in his suspicions.

The two men stood glowering at each other, ready at the first provocation to engage in battle, and for an instant there came into Lloyd's mind the thought that he and Dennys might possibly escape at this moment; but he put it aside almost as soon as it was formed, knowing that death, or, at the best, severe wounds, might follow such attempt, for Hickey was ripe to do any mischief.

While one might have counted twenty the angry men stood facing each other, and then Billings, being the first to control himself, said in a tone of suppressed excitement:

“You shall answer for this to none other than his excellency, the governor.”

“It is before him I intend *you* shall go.”

“Then since we appear to be of the same mind, let us embark at once, for it is time you were checked in your arrogance, or that I draw back from an enterprise which is endangered by such as you.”

“I intend to take you before his excellency within the hour!” Hickey cried, and Billings replied with more of calmness than he had shown since the quarrel began :

“Whether you take me there, or I you, makes little difference since we appear before him. Get into that boat, and we will pull out to the Duchess of Gordon.”

“These lads are my prisoners, and shall go with me.”

“They are to accompany us ; but not as your prisoners. Now hark you, Master Hickey, I am fast losing patience, and will do you a mischief if this conversation be continued many moments longer. Lads, do you go into my boat, and we will see that this fighting-cock

has his spurs cropped 'twixt now and sunrise."

As he spoke the old man began launching the boat, and the soldier, still holding the knife in his hand, stood in a threatening attitude over those whom he claimed as prisoners.

Once the skiff was afloat and before Hickey could give any commands, Lloyd and Dennys stepped on board.

They had good reason to fear that the soldier could so far excite suspicion against them as that they should be imprisoned, if nothing worse followed; but of the two evils, this accompanying Hickey when Billings went along as their friend, was the least, and there was yet a hope that something might come up which would favor them.

Lloyd and Dennys bestowed themselves in the bow of the boat; the soldier stood on the midship thwart, where he could keep guard over them, and Billings plied the oars well aft

that he might thereby properly trim the little craft.

Not a word was spoken during this voyage in the darkness. On arriving within fifty yards of the armed ship they were hailed by the lookout on deck, who cried sharply :

“Boat ahoy ! Cease rowing until you can give an account of yourselves !”

“I desire speech with Master Smart !” Hickey cried, and the lookout asked with a laugh :

“And who may you be who thus speaks in so commanding a tone ?”

“Master Smart will know my voice, and there is no reason why I should bawl out for everyone to hear.”

“You may say that Caleb Billings, who is not ashamed of his name or his work, craves speech with some one in authority on board the ship,” the boatman added, and a moment later the voice of Smart was heard as he called out :

“Pull alongside, Billings, and unless your errand be of great importance you may rue having come without being summoned.”

“I have brought him as prisoner,” Hickey shouted, no longer able to control himself. “He and the two boys who quitted this ship a short time ago!”

“Hold your tongue, you fool,” Master Smart cried angrily. “If you have business to transact, come on board and make it known, instead of remaining there where prying ears may hear your words.”

Hickey was silenced by this reproof; but it was the silence of a man who is confident he shall soon triumph, and only awaits his opportunity.

Billings pulled the boat alongside; Lloyd caught the rope which was passed them by one of the sailors, and Hickey sprang over the rail eager to tell his story.

“Let him go!” the boatman said contemptu-

ously. "We will wait until having been summoned."

"But he will prove we are guilty of that with which he charges us, while no defense is made," Lloyd objected.

"Let him do it, and then we shall have our say, for I warrant you Master Smart is not one to hear a single side of any question, and he knows full well that I am to be trusted."

Then the boatman fell silent, and the boys holding each other's hands awaited the result of the interview which might decide whether they were to live or be murdered.

It is hardly possible to describe the conflicting emotions in the minds of each. Both realized fully the perils which menaced, and were the more disturbed because of knowing that the charges brought against them were true.

There was only this thing to give them comfort. It was positive Hickey had not heard any of their conversation with Paul Stubbs, other-

wise in his anger he would have made known such fact.

Then again the lads had good reason to believe that should they disappear, because of being held prisoners on board the ship, General Putnam would make every effort to discover their whereabouts, and until Sir William Howe's forces should arrive the Continentals were stronger in New York than the Britishers.

However this was but a single ray of light in all the gloom which surrounded them. They had embarked in the work of unearthing the plot voluntarily, and now was really come the time when they had failed, by reason of being discovered.

That Governor Tryon would cause them to be executed if it was proven they had betrayed the secret, there could be no doubt, and it seemed at that moment as if it was only a question as to who would have the most influence

with the king's representatives, Thomas Hickey or Caleb Billings.

Not until fully ten minutes had passed did any word come from Master Smart, and then one of the petty officers of the ship, leaning over the rail, said in a low tone :

“You and the lads are to come on board, Billings.”

“It is time, I should say, for that crazy soldier must have told all he knew and considerably more. When the word of one like him can be taken as against mine, honest men had best give such as the Duchess of Gordon a wide berth.”

“I do not understand what you mean, Billings; but suppose you have good cause for complaint. The soldier appears to love the king most desperately at all events.”

“Ay, he so appears,” Billings replied, as he swung himself over the rail; “but whether all be as it seems is another question in my mind.

Come on, lads, and we'll soon know how this matter is to end."

The boys had followed him up the ladder, and were by his side on the deck when he ceased speaking.

"You are to come with me," the redcoated officer said in a not unfriendly tone, and straightway marched aft, thus intimating that the matter was to be investigated by no less than the governor himself, otherwise had they been taken to Master Smart's quarters.

When the three gained the state saloon, where was seated the king's official, they understood that the charges preferred by Hickey were considered of no mean importance and seriousness, because of the expression to be seen on the faces of all. Master Smart conducted the affair, and he began by saying as he addressed himself wholly to Caleb Billings:

"What know you of the doings of these lads after they left the landing-stage?"

“No more than they have told me, which is not much; but this I make bold to say, even in the presence of his excellency, that the suspicion of a crazy soldier is not proof when a human life hangs in the balance, else if such be the case many of us who are now embarked in a certain enterprise had best withdraw while there is time.”

“It is too late to go backward now,” one of the officers present said sternly. “Those who set out upon a work cannot, because of a whim or personal desires, throw off all responsibility in the matter. Once having sworn, you are bound to continue the task.”

Master Smart added as soon as the gentleman ceased speaking:

“There need be no fear that suspicions will be received as proof; but when the question is of the fidelity of one enrolled among us, then the time is come for a rigid examination. This is due to all, because the common safety demands it.”

“But I am making no complaint on that account. I know these lads, and when they were driven like sheep by Hickey to where I stood, the blood streaming from wounds which he had wantonly inflicted, while he loudly threatened that they should be killed before morning, then it was I believed it my duty to lend them aid.”

“How have they been wounded?” Master Smart asked, and even the governor looked up in surprise.

“Take off your coats, lads, that all may see what this loud-spoken soldier of the ragamuffin army is willing to do when he runs no risk of being chastised.”

The boys obeyed quickly, and although the wounds on their backs were no more than slight punctures of the skin, sufficient blood had been drawn to crimson their shirts until it was as if they had been grievously injured.

“Why was that done?” Governor Tryon asked, and Hickey would have made reply but

that Master Smart checked him with a gesture, as Lloyd said:

“Because we refused to move as quickly as he demanded. May it please your excellency, my comrade and I had just come from rowing a boat to West Point and back without sleep since night before last; weary to the verge of exhaustion, and eager to be at our homes lest suspicion be aroused because of prolonged absence, it was but natural we should defend ourselves; but only did so by remonstrances.”

“Attend to the matter, Giles,” the governor said with a careless wave of the hand, as if he thought it beneath his dignity to hold converse with the lads; and Master Smart said in a tone which caused the boys to understand that, however informal the meeting might be, this was really an examination which might result in the sentence of death.

“It is said that on leaving this ship, where you had been intrusted with the secret of a cer-

tain enterprise, you held private converse with a soldier in the rebel army, during which you betrayed what was so lately sealed with your oaths."

Again Hickey attempted to speak, and Master Smart said sternly :

"You have had full opportunity of making charges, and will now remain silent until called upon."

"We did have speech with the soldier," Lloyd replied ; "but that in itself could not have been any crime since we know there are soldiers in the American forces who have embarked in the same enterprise as we. This one, however, was an acquaintance who met us by accident, and we spoke him fairly on matters concerning only ourselves. Then he went his way, and this other soldier came up, insisting that we were spies and declaring we should be killed before sunrise."

"Who is the man with whom you converse?"

“ Paul Stubbs.”

“ And what was the nature of the talk between you ?”

“ Something so trifling as not to remain in the mind after the excitement caused by Hickey. He reminded us that the hour was late, and two lads like us should be at home ; asked where we had come from, whereat we told him we had but lately parted with Master Billings, and such light words passed between us of no moment, and with so little of importance in them that one could hardly remember them save in a general way. At the time there was in my mind the thought that this friend could be induced to join the enterprise with which you are connected, sir, and I spoke somewhat of the opportunity for getting money that would be to his advantage.”

“ What reply did he make ?”

“ If I remember rightly there was nothing definite said. The hour was late, and he ap-

peared to believe we should go home rather than remain on the street."

"How long were you with him?"

"Not above two or three minutes; certainly no longer time than we have already spent in your presence."

"And you saw none other than he?"

"We had but just landed, sir, and Hickey must have followed us instantly we left Master Billings, for it is in my mind that we could not have been away from the landing-stage five minutes when he seized us on the street, declaring that we were his prisoners."

Master Smart stood for a moment as if in thought, looking up at the governor, who made no remark; then he turned toward Caleb Billings, as he asked:

"Can you tell us more regarding this matter?"

"Nothing save I repeat the loud and angry words used by Hickey which would in themselves have been enough to betray somewhat of

our plans, were they overheard. Late as was the hour he made a most unseemly disturbance, declaring the boys should be executed as spies, and I leave it to you, sir, that if such should be heard by certain of the rebels, particularly when applied to the sons of Abraham Howland and Master Dacre, it would have provoked a rigid inquiry. I charge Hickey with having done more toward betraying the secret than was in the power of these boys during the short time they were away from me."

"There need be no counter-charges brought now. The question is only as to whether the lads are guilty, as he claims."

"Surely their words are as good as his, and if they should be guilty, then will I say we were betrayed in shorter time than I ever knew an enterprise before, for it was to me as if they had but just left the landing-stage when he drove them back, brandishing his knife, and, as you have seen, using it repeatedly while he pro-

claimed to all who might be within hearing that they should of a surety meet death before sunrise."

Master Smart stepped to the side of Governor Tryon, and after a brief conversation which was conducted in whispers, said to the prisoners :

"You will come with me, lads, until this matter may be finally settled."

Having thus spoken he led the way on deck, and once more into the same small cabin where the boys were first received.

"This time I shall make no apology for locking the door upon you," he said gravely. "You can well understand that for a certain while you are in truth prisoners."

"But surely you will not condemn us to death upon the guesses of such as Hickey?" Lloyd cried.

"You will receive fullest justice, of that there need be no fear."

Then he left the cabin, and the boys stood looking into each other's eyes, not daring to give words to the thoughts in their minds, for they knew full well there was much of danger menacing them at that moment.

CHAPTER VII.

GUILTY.

KNOWING that they were guilty of the charges which Thomas Hickey had made without having sufficient reason, this fact caused the boys to look more gloomily to the future than if it had been possible to clear themselves by telling the truth.

Each tried to console himself with the thought that the soldier had no proof against him; the fact that, however vindictive he might be, there was no tangible evidence of their guilt upon which he could put his hand, but had accused them thus gravely simply upon suspicion, would necessarily weaken, in the minds of those who had charge of the affair, any statement he might make.

But this last was as nothing compared to the absolute fact, and where there were so many conspirators, it was quite probable some one in the plot had seen them entering or going from General Putnam's headquarters, in which case such evidence would be forthcoming once the fact of their arrest had been made known to those concerned.

"Do you think they will make any attempt at having speech with Paul Stubbs?" Dennys asked in a tremulous whisper as the two remained standing exactly where Master Smart had left them.

"It is not unlikely. Where there are so many in the plot, and among them those whom we could have sworn were devoted to the cause, there is little doubt but that some one will be found who may approach him with safety."

"And in case he hesitates ever so slightly in agreeing to the story we have told, or makes a

different statement, then indeed is our doom sealed."

"Ay, so far as these people be concerned ; but see you not how much good may come to us if Paul Stubbs was thus questioned ?"

"I fail to see in it anything but evil."

"Surely are you grown thicker-headed than ever before if you do not understand how this could be to our advantage. Suppose Paul Stubbs should be questioned concerning us ? He is not so dull but that he would believe we were fallen into trouble, and more especially so if he searches to-morrow and fails to find us. If he be the man I take him for but little time will elapse before he learns where we are."

"Even then how might he aid us ? I question if General Putnam himself, or even the commander-in-chief, would be able to rescue us in time ; for once it has been decided we are guilty, you know as well as I that punishment will speedily follow."

“They will think twice before murdering us, whose fathers are of some little consequence in the city,” Lloyd said stoutly, as if arguing with himself.

“Of how much consequence in the eyes of a Britisher is any colonist, and more particularly now, when we are in rebellion against the king? If Governor Tryon can find six hundred persons in the city of New York who are willing to plot murder against General Washington, of what account are we two lads, even though your father be a prosperous merchant and mine one who has had some voice in the affairs of the colony?”

Lloyd began to understand now as he had not done before, that they had little to hope for, so far as the social position of their parents was concerned, and straightway he was plunged into a greater depth of despondency than was Dennys.

During perhaps five minutes the two faced

each other in silence, and then Lloyd exclaimed petulantly :

“Of what benefit is it that we look upon the darkest side of this matter? No good can come from losing heart, and much evil may follow, since, should we see a way out of the difficulty we would not be in as good condition to benefit by it.”

“Have you so far lost heart, Lloyd, as to think that there is no hope for us save by escape? Surely that is what your words imply.”

“I was but following your example and taking the gloomiest view of it. I cannot believe Thomas Hickey would be able to persuade even a bitter enemy of ours that what was done by us this night could be proof of guilt; yet such may be the case.”

Now it was Dennys who played the part of comforter by suddenly changing the subject of conversation, as he spoke of the dear ones at home, wondering whether their prolonged ab-

sence would cause alarm, and otherwise leading his comrade's thoughts from the main question in the case.

The two were speaking of their mothers when the rattle of the key in the lock was heard, and they turned about, expecting to see Master Smart.

It was Caleb Billings who entered, and that he had not brought good news seemed to have been proven by the fact that the door was locked behind him.

"Are you a prisoner too?" Dennys cried in surprise.

"Not so, lad, although I might be could I have got my hands on that overbearing soldier, for a verity I would have flogged him even before his excellency, the governor, but that they restrained me."

"Then he had more to say after we were brought away?"

"Of a truth he had, and it would seem as if



"Are you a prisoner too?" Dennys cried in surprise.—Page 158.

the wretch had but one desire, which is to take your lives."

"Is it possible he can convince such intelligent men as Governor Tryon and those about him that we be spies, simply because we were seen to speak with Paul Stubbs?"

"Lads, I have known you since the day Master Dacre brought two toddling children to take passage in my boat," Caleb began gravely, "and little thought the time would ever come when we three should be concerned in what might lead us to disgraceful death; yet such is the case, as I must admit."

"Why do you speak thus sorrowfully?" Lloyd asked, in so loud a tone that the old boatman checked him with a gesture, and the boy continued in a whisper:

"One would almost say you had come to believe we were spies."

Instead of replying directly to this remark which was little less than a question, the old

boatman continued with a deeply serious manner :

“ I embarked in this business, lads, without knowing all which it was proposed to do, and later held true because of my oath; yet never did I swear to be concerned in the death of two lads who might come into the matter, believing they served the cause which as children they have been taught to love.”

Both the boys were thoroughly alarmed by the tone and manner in which the old man spoke, and Dennys, taking him by the hands, cried :

“ It must be that they have already decided upon our death ?”

“ Not so, lad; yet of a verity I believe that villainous Thomas Hickey will be able to compass it! This I say, not that you may be cast down, but lest hearing somewhat of it suddenly you were overwhelmed: The work you engaged in is a man's part, and as men, rather

than lads, you must bear yourselves now. Because of my having been faithful to the oath taken I am allowed a visit here at this time in order to give you comfort, and yet I am all at sea to know how that may be done.”

“Do you mean that the governor and Master Smart, to say nothing of those other Britishers, will condemn us because by chance we stumbled upon Paul Stubbs while returning home?”

“It is well you should know all, lads, and his story is much stronger than seemed at first. It appears he saw you coming from General Putnam’s headquarters hardly more than two hours before your proposal to join in the business, which accounts for the sharp questioning he indulged in at that time. He also claims to have seen this Paul Stubbs, in civilian’s garb, loitering nearabout Whitehall Slip during the greater portion of to-day. Taking all that in connection with the fact that you held conver-

sation with the soldier, shows that he was waiting for none other than you two, and puts a different aspect on the case."

"Then you also have come to the belief we are guilty?" Lloyd said, speaking hardly louder than a whisper, so great was his anguish, for now indeed did death seem close upon them.

"I have not come to air my beliefs or suspicions. You two are in my eyes hardly more than children whom I have known these ten years or more, and if the venture upon which we are embarked calls for the taking of such lives as yours, it were time an old man like myself withdrew even at the expense of his own life."

"Then you will aid us?" Dennys cried, again clasping Caleb's hand as hope began to spring up in his heart.

"I would, lads, for a certainty, did I know how it might be done. On board this ship are only those, save perhaps you two, who serve

the king faithfully, and would believe it a crime to wink at your escape. What may I, single-handed, hope to do against these?"

"Nothing!" Dennys replied mournfully, releasing the old man's hands and staggering back against the edge of the bunk.

"So it would seem; yet am I minded to watch for any opportunity, and should one come, however slight, we will take advantage of it even though the odds are against our escaping with our lives, for yours are forfeited most like if you remain on board twenty-four hours longer."

"Then you at least do not believe us to be spies?" Dennys cried, eager to learn that amid all their enemies there was one who held them guiltless.

"Lads, I have not asked you the question. I should believe you guiltless of this thing, did you assure me on your word that such was the case; yet from all that has been told this night

it is in my opinion best you make no pretense."

"And even though we did not you would aid us if you could?"

"Ay, because, as I have said, this venture was not made by me with the thought that it could cost the lives of two children. It was only to bid you be of good heart that I came here, and lest suspicion should be brought upon myself, it is well I go now. Be ready for anything which may come up; but should the worst occur, remember that death is not the most terrible thing which can come upon man or boy."

Then Caleb knocked loudly on the door as a signal that he was ready to bring the visit to a close, and after some waiting, footsteps could be heard in the distance, telling that his summons was about to be answered.

He looked around at the boys as if minded to say something more, and then, evidently repent-

ing of the purpose, turned his face toward the door, much as though he would shut out from view the sight of their misery.

When he was gone the two boys, understanding only too well how little of hope remained for them, could not indulge in conversation.

Each was striving to keep back the tears he believed it would be unmanly to let fall, and dared not speak lest by so doing he should allow his grief to overpower him.

While there was so much of anguish in a certain small cabin on board the *Duchess of Gordon*, matters concerning these two boys were being advanced in the city, and in order that all may be understood in its regular course, it is necessary to listen to the latter portion of a conversation held between Master Smart and Thomas Hickey on the deck of the armed ship at nearabout daylight on the morning after Lloyd and Dennys had been made prisoners on the charge of being spies.

These two men had come out of the main saloon, looking much as do those who have spent the entire night in labor, and Master Smart said with the air of a superior who is pleased with the doings of his subordinate :

“ You have apparently rendered a most signal service to the venture, Hickey, and your reward shall be commensurate with the faithfulness you displayed. Even though we should be justified in punishing these lads without further testimony, I would not that we stained our hands with blood unless it seemed absolutely necessary.”

“ It has become so,” Hickey replied with much of vindictiveness in his tone, “ unless you are minded to hold them prisoners on board the ship until we have accomplished our purpose. Because they are the sons of men who stand high among their brother rebels, should they escape the reward which they have earned ?”

“ By no means. Do not understand me as

pleading for them because of their connections. Were they sons of the most loyal men in the city, the same punishment should be given ; but I would have the matter settled beyond a peradventure, since you have suggested this means of ascertaining, and his excellency has been pleased to put it all in your hands.”

“I will have speech with Paul Stubbs before nightfall and repeat honestly and exactly, so far as may be, his very words. Should he bear out the statement made by these lads, regardless of the fact that he loitered in the vicinity of Whitehall Slip during yesterday on the watch for some one, and only left after the boys arrived, then I will be the first to admit the mistake.”

“Of that I have no doubt, Hickey ; but keep well in mind that our work is of the first importance ; that you must give rise to no suspicions, for it would be a serious job if we betrayed ourselves through being overcautious.”

“There can be no risk in such work as I figure it myself, Master Smart. Should these boys be spies, then of a truth does Stubbs know all which we have done, and I can give him no additional information. If he is yet ignorant it shall be my care that he remains so.”

“Will it be possible for you to report on board this vessel before sunset?”

“I have leave of absence for forty-eight hours, therefore am my own man until day-break to-morrow.”

“Then I shall see you before the day is done?”

“Yes, and in the meantime you will have careful watch set over the prisoners?”

“Of that you may be certain.”

“It does not pleasure me that Caleb Billings should be allowed another private interview with them, for I can but distrust him also.”

“Now you are grown oversuspicious, Hickey, through having made one successful discovery. Billings is faithful, though soft-hearted; but

there is little need you should let your mind be troubled; the boatman has gone on shore, and can have no excuse for paying the ship another visit until he be summoned."

Master Hickey did not longer delay. A boat, manned by four men, was waiting alongside, and into this he dropped, waving his hand in adieu to the governor's confidential agent.

Two hours later Paul Stubbs was strolling in an apparently aimless fashion nearby the fort in the vicinity of Bridge Street, when he was accosted by one in the uniform of a Guardsman, whom he recognized as Hickey.

The soldier greeted Stubbs in a friendly manner by crying:

"Well, comrade, how does it come that I see you abroad without a uniform? Is it true that your term of service has expired?"

"I am on six days' leave, and have left my regimentals behind me for the sake of comfort.

I supposed you Guardsmen were not allowed to roam overmuch?"

"Like yourself, I am on leave, although it is only for forty-eight hours, half of which time has already expired. Are you bound for any particular place?"

"Only enjoying a stroll, for it is long since I have taken one without being hampered by accouterments."

"Then it could not have been you I saw last night?"

"Where?"

"Not far from Whitehall Slip. I cried out, but got no reply."

"Yes, it was me," Stubbs replied, as if trying to recall the events of the previous night. "I was somewhere thereabouts, but just at the moment fail to remember. However, certain it is that I called not that a stroll for pleasure."

"Then you were still on duty?"

“Not so ; but yet I had somewhat of business to perform.”

“You were talking to two lads when I first observed you,” Hickey said, watching closely his companion’s face.

Stubbs gave no evidence of surprise or uneasiness, because from what the boys had told him he knew the Guardsman to be one of the conspirators, and understood full well why he was thus accosted.

“Yes, I stopped for a moment to speak with young Dacre and Howland, for it is in my mind that they think of enlisting.”

“Could you not persuade them ?”

“I only made mention of what we would have them do. Their haste was great, and it was not a fitting time to go into the details of the matter.”

Now Stubbs was doing his share of the watching, and he noted a certain triumphant look come into Hickey’s eyes as he thus made a

statement decidedly in opposition to what the boys had told.

The traitorous Guardsman had accomplished his purpose with but brief expenditure of time, and yet was so incautious as to give his companion cause for suspicion.

Knowing as he did the danger in which the boys were placed, Stubbs was not long in hitting upon the truth of the matter, or, it may be more correct to say, in "guessing at the truth."

Like a flash there came to him the thought that Lloyd and Dennys had been accused by this man of double dealing, and on the instant he resolved to take some desperate chances on his own responsibility.

That Hickey told the truth in saying he had a forty-eight-hour leave of absence the soldier knew full well, because he had satisfied himself on that point the previous afternoon, doing so in order to learn whether the conspirator would

be able to meet the boys on their return from West Point.

Now it was for him an easy matter to guess that the Guardsman had lately come from the Duchess of Gordon, and, even though ignorant of the danger in which Lloyd and Dennys were placed, he was resolved Hickey should not long enjoy his liberty, if it could be prevented.

“Since we both have leave of absence, and it is yet early in the day, suppose we stroll together?” he said, with an assumption of carelessness. “I am hoping that it may be possible for me to fill the next vacancy in the Guards, and therefore it is well that I have an acquaintance with those who may soon be comrades.”

Hickey, believing his work had been well accomplished, and not caring to return to the ship immediately, saw no reason why he should not do as Stubbs suggested, therefore assented to the proposition, and the two, arm in arm,

went down Bridge Street to Broad and thence to the Sign of The Ship, which at that time was much frequented by soldiers in the Continental army.

Stubbs had much to say during the short walk of his desire to become a Guardsman ; but Hickey's mind was so filled with thoughts of the triumph in thus having, to his own satisfaction at least, proven the boys to be spies, that he could not join heartily in the conversation, all of which but served to strengthen the suspicions already formed in his companion's mind.

On arriving at the inn, Stubbs, with the air of a roisterer, insisted upon ordering refreshments, and in every possible way played the part of host, with the one hope in his mind that he might soon meet with comrades whom he could trust.

It was yet too early in the day, however, to see many of the patrons of "The Ship," and

when the two had spent an hour they were still the only soldiers in the place.

The time had not been wasted, however, so far as Stubbs was concerned, for during it he gained a reasonably good idea regarding the condition of affairs. Hickey, his mind ever on the one subject, could not refrain from leading the conversation up from time to time to the previous evening, when Stubbs had met the boys, and the more of the landlord's strong ale he consumed, the more persistent was he in this matter, until it would have been a dull man indeed who could not have guessed somewhat of the situation.

What it might be Stubbs could accomplish he did not know ; neither was it possible to say whether he would be aiding the boys by coming to an open rupture with this Guardsman, or do them yet greater injury ; yet he was determined that the traitor should not leave him while it could be prevented.

As if overburdened with money he played the part of host in the most generous fashion, and just when Hickey began to show signs of wanting to part company with his entertainer, half a dozen American soldiers entered, and fortunately, among them were two well known to Stubbs.

These newcomers joined the two at the table, and now that Hickey could not well take his departure immediately, the man who was doing his utmost to aid the prisoners on board the Duchess of Gordon, said to one of his comrades but lately arrived :

“ If it so be you are minded, David, I would close that transaction here and now, for we may not have as convenient an opportunity.”

At the same moment, unperceived by the others, he made an expressive gesture to his friend, and rose from the table, stepping a few paces away.

The man whom he had called David fol-

lowed, and once they were beyond earshot of the merry-makers, Stubbs whispered hurriedly:

“This man, Hickey, as I have good reason for knowing, since my being detailed on special duty, concerns him, is up to much mischief. I do not dare come to an open rupture with him; but if you will contrive a plan whereby he can be held in custody for a few hours, I am answerable for it that you shall win the gratitude of General Putnam.”

“Are you certain of your ground, Paul? This Hickey is one of Washington’s Guards.”

“That I well know, David; but yet he must be held prisoner in some way until I can have speech with the general.”

“All that may be easily come at if you pledge your word that I shall be held blameless in the matter.”

“I can guarantee you will receive thanks, if no more, from the general.”

“Then watch well the opportunity. I will engage Hickey in conversation, and the odds are in favor of my exciting his anger. After that it will not be difficult to raise a brawl, during which you cry loudly for the watch, and once they have come, charge both Hickey and myself with raising a disturbance. It appears to me that should answer your purpose.”

“So it will, David, and a rare good plan it is. Set about it at once, for he has already shown signs of being ready to depart.”

David returned to his seat at the table, and Paul, on the pretense of a breath of fresh air, went to the door, where he stood looking up and down the street, intending to hail one of the watch or the patrol, whichever he should first see.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

PAUL STUBBS was taking an unwarranted degree of authority upon himself in thus planning to make of Thomas Hickey a prisoner, and should it be learned that his suspicions were unfounded he would be placed in a most serious position.

All this he understood full well, and had it been possible to have made certain Hickey would remain in the city two or three hours longer, Stubbs would first have searched for the young spies, because as yet he could not say positively that they were in the hands of the English.

As it was, however, he argued with himself

that it were better to make a mistake by showing too much zeal so far as this Guardsman was concerned than, by delay, increase the possible danger which menaced the boys.

He had been standing in the doorway of the inn no more than two or three minutes when he saw a squad of men in charge of a sergeant coming down the street.

He recognized these approaching soldiers, who were acquaintances of his, and should there arise any good cause for taking into custody the inmates of the inn, Stubbs knew beyond a peradventure they would be held securely until morning at the very least.

He heard his friend David's voice raised high and in angry tones. A quarrel was being provoked; but the squad was likely to pass before it amounted to a disturbance, and Stubbs took it upon himself to halt them.

"I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," he said to himself, "and if the arrest of

Hickey is a mistake, then it is likely to be no more serious if I enlist these men in my behalf."

The sergeant stepped forward a few paces when the squad had come to a standstill, and Hickey said to him hurriedly :

"You know that I have been on duty at General Putnam's headquarters?"

"Ay, and why are you now in citizen's clothing?"

"Because of having been detailed to such work as would scarce permit the wearing of a uniform. There is in the tavern here a certain Guardsman who, for reasons which I cannot explain to you now, but will later, should be kept in custody at least so long as it will require me to make a report. There is like to be a disturbance within a few moments, and you will win the thanks of General Putnam by waiting here until it becomes necessary to take the quarrelsome soldiers to the guardhouse.

Once there I ask, if it be possible, that you make it your personal duty to see that the Guardsman is not released until after I come to you from the general with orders regarding him."

"But I have no right to loiter here on the street," the sergeant said in perplexity. "If there was a brawl it would be my duty to enter and take away any of our men who might be there."

The sergeant had no more than ceased speaking when there was a loud angry shout from within, mingled with sounds as if the table had been overturned, and the voice of the landlord could be heard calling loudly for the watch.

"You had not long to wait," Stubbs said in a tone of satisfaction. "One of the brawlers is a Guardsman by the name of Hickey. He is the man whom General Putnam would have detained on some such pretext as this until I can speak with you again."

The sergeant made no delay now that his duty called him into the tavern; but Paul Stubbs did not think it necessary he should follow.

Standing in the doorway nearby, where he could see all that took place without being observed, the soldier waited until the squad came out with two prisoners, one of whom was, as a matter of course, Hickey, and the other Stubbs' friend, David, who by thus doing a favor for a comrade was like to spend the remainder of the day in the guardhouse.

As soon as the disturbers of the peace had been marched away the soldier who was bent on aiding the young spies went with all speed toward General Putnam's headquarters, and arriving there, had the good fortune to find the commander disengaged for the moment.

Hurriedly Stubbs told the little which he knew and explained his suspicions, saying in conclusion:

“If these lads have gotten into trouble it is because their purpose has been discovered, and you know well, sir, that those who are plotting against the commander-in-chief would not hesitate to take the lives of two boys.”

“You speak truly, Stubbs, and have shown commendable tact in thus disposing of the Guardsman. I will see to it that he be not released until you have had time to make all the necessary investigations. Should you need assistance, come here at once; but be absolutely positive of your ground before taking such steps as might cause it to be suspected that we are in possession of the facts concerning the plot. In other words you have simply to busy yourself with finding the lads, or discovering their whereabouts.”

Stubbs did not wait for further instructions. He understood how precious the time might be just then, and hurried away to make certain Lloyd and Dennys were not in the city.

He was not ignorant as to where they lived; but believed something might be learned concerning them from the boatman, Caleb Billings, and toward Whitehall Slip he went with all decent speed.

During the previous day when he had lounged in that vicinity waiting for the lads, and thereby was the indirect means of causing their arrest, he had seen the old man near the boats, and therefore was acquainted with his face.

On this morning Billings was seated on an upturned cask some distance aloof from those who plied their calling as boatmen in that vicinity, and on his countenance was an expression of deepest anxiety.

Stubbs noted this without giving particular heed to it; but was so eager to conclude the work upon which he was engaged that he broached the subject nearest his heart, regardless of whether the one whom he questioned was willing to give ear.

“Know you two lads, one called Lloyd Dacre and the other Dennys Howland?” And so quickly and eagerly did Billings look up at him that he came nigh to starting in surprise.

“Have you heard aught of them?” the boatman asked sharply.

“Ay; they be acquaintances of mine.”

“And you are the man who loitered nearby here yesterday speaking with them after night-fall as they left this slip?”

“I did hold brief converse with them last night; but because of their haste to return home had not time to say all which was in my mind.”

“You said enough, and it were better for them you had broken your neck before coming here.”

This was spoken in an angry tone, and Stubbs was wholly at a loss to know the meaning of it.

For a moment he forgot how ardent was his

desire to learn where the boys might be, and looked inquiringly at the boatman.

While one might have counted twenty, Billings remained silent, gazing scrutinizingly at the man before him, and then said slowly:

“Ay; you are like to have compassed their death by sheer foolishness.”

“You must be crazy, otherwise you could not talk in such fashion.”

“I am not now, but shall be if matters progress as they have begun. Hark you, Master Stubbs, for that be your name, if I am not mistaken. May a man trust you with his liberty, perhaps his life, in order to save those two lads from death?”

Now it was the soldier began to understand somewhat of the thoughts in the old man's mind, and he said earnestly:

“If there be any assurance I can give you, speak and let it be arranged, for there is in my mind the thought that I can tell very nearly

where those lads may be located at this moment."

"Yet by making it known to you I put myself in the power of your officers, for I am fully aware you come from General Putnam's headquarters, since the boys themselves have said so. Not only that, but I am breaking an oath which may cost my life."

"I pledge, so far as man may, that those whom I serve will hold you blameless of whatever plots or conspiracies you may have been engaged in, so that these boys be rescued, for I can quite well guess that they are on board the Duchess of Gordon with Governor Tryon."

Again Caleb Billings remained silent a moment, and then asked, speaking slowly, as if weighing well every word:

"How much may you know of what I have been concerned in, Master Stubbs? Nay, hesitate not, for by this time I understand why the

lads were so eager to have the handling of the king's gold; and yet, although they were spying upon me with the others, I would come nigh to laying down my own life to serve them, and it is in my mind that you have heard all they learned, else you would not have loitered here yesterday nor had speech with them last night, when to do so was dangerous for all concerned. Now I ask, as man to man, how much do you know of what I may have been concerned in?"

Stubbs hesitated only the merest fraction of time, and then, reading in the old man's face a certain integrity of purpose, despite the fact that he was a conspirator against the colony, replied quietly:

"All which may have been told the boys was repeated to me."

"Then may we talk plainly, Master Stubbs. But first you must bear with me awhile, for if one returns who has been the prime cause of all

this trouble, we shall have little opportunity of conversing privately together."

"You mean Thomas Hickey, the Guardsman?"

"Ay, and I see you are well informed."

"Then you may rest easy in mind so far as he is concerned, for that man will not interrupt us this day."

"Has he been taken into custody?" Billings asked in alarm.

"Only on the charge of taking part in a brawl at the Sign of the Ship. From what he said I had a suspicion that it was well he be deprived of liberty for a certain number of hours."

"It *is* well," Caleb Billings said emphatically, "for just so much more time is left at our disposal, if we would aid those who stand nigh to death."

"Have the lads been sentenced as spies, even though by no usages of war could they be so called?"

“It matters little whether they be called spies or traitors. Both were embarked in a certain venture, and it is believed would have betrayed their associates. Unless a rescue can be effected between now and sunrise to-morrow, I fear this is their last day on earth. By telling all I am putting myself in your power, and stand good show of being hanged by one party or the other.”

“I believe, Master Billings, I can safely promise for the American commanders that no harm will come to you, because of having given me the information necessary, and it should not be difficult for you to escape those concerned in the conspiracy. Would you go yet further, and do what might be possible toward saving the lads?”

“Ay, Master Stubbs; I would make the attempt, even though knowing it should cost my life; for when I went into this venture it was made to appear as if a man who served the king

might embark in it without fear of being called upon to do other than that which is honorable. When the business may not be done without the murder of children, Caleb Billings takes no further part in it, however many oaths he has given."

"The lads are on board the Duchess of Gordon?"

"Ay."

"And you would be received by those who serve Governor Tryon should you present yourself there?"

"That is as may be, Master Stubbs. It was last night, shortly after you had speech with the boys, that Hickey followed them, forcing them to go on board the ship on the charge of being spies. I went also, and there said all a man might—more than was wise under all the circumstances—in the behalf of the lads whom I come to know had been spying upon us. It seems that Hickey had seen them coming from

General Putnam's headquarters, and that fact, together with your loitering nearabout here until they arrived, was sufficient to prove their guilt. Now, because of what I said in their behalf, it is probable Master Smart would look with suspicion upon my coming to the ship unless having been summoned."

"Do you know when they expected Hickey would return?"

"I am guessing that he came on shore in search of further evidence, counting on going back so soon as he had secured it."

"We could not make an attack upon the ship," Stubbs said half to himself, hearing which, Master Billings said:

"I doubt much whether the leaders of the American army would do such a thing, even though they had the power; but there is no need that we should discuss such a matter, for where is the craft that could make an attack upon the ship with any hope of success?"

Stubbs had not realized until the old man spoke how useless it would be to attempt a rescue by force; but now that he understood the matter, it was as if hope well-nigh departed, and he asked mournfully :

“Can you think of any way, Master Billings, by which our purposes might be accomplished?”

“I have been figuring on the matter since leaving the Duchess of Gordon last night, and am no nearer the end of it than when I began. There is this much certain to my mind, however : They are not in danger of death before to-morrow morning, and what is done must be carried out after night comes. I had in mind to go to the fathers of these lads, telling them all I knew, and then came the thought that they could do nothing, even though standing high among the Royalists of the city, for Governor Tryon will never allow them to leave the Duchess of Gordon alive with knowledge of the plot in their possession.”

“And it seems well-nigh useless for you and I to undertake anything by ourselves. We can get aid from headquarters, if soldiers would be of benefit.”

“Two could accomplish more than a dozen, therefore we had best work alone after a plan has been formed. Sit you down, Master Stubbs, and while I remain here ready to receive any word which may come from the Duchess of Gordon, we two will put our minds to studying out how far we might hope to go.”

The hours passed until noon. More than once did Paul Stubbs believe he had hit upon a scheme which might result favorably for their purpose; but the boatman was not satisfied with any of the suggestions which were proposed for his consideration.

Then, when it seemed to the soldier as if they must abandon all attempts of working unaided, Caleb Billings gave words to the plan which he had evolved in his mind, and it seemed

a good one, although depending largely upon chances.

What it was had best be told later while describing the course of events.

Having repeated it twice over to his companion, he said, as if a great weight had been taken from his mind:

“We will pin all our faith on that, and trust to accident for the balance. Instead of loitering here, you had best go away, lest some one from the ship grows suspicious at seeing me hold too long a conversation with you. Return at sunset, and we will make the venture, which, if not successful, is like to cost me my life, while you may look forward to a long stay in the king’s prisons.”

The two parted, Stubbs going directly to No. 1 Broadway, where he related all the events of the morning to General Putnam, and received from that officer the assurance that Hickey should be kept in close confinement, even

though it became necessary to charge him then and there with conspiring against the life of the commander-in-chief.

It was not yet sunset when Stubbs returned to Whitehall Slip, and then the citizens were in a ferment, for it was told openly around the town that no less a personage than Mayor Matthews had been arrested, charged with a conspiracy to kill General Washington; that Gilbert Forbes, the gunsmith, was in prison, and with him no less than twelve prominent Royalists.

The people were in the highest state of excitement. Those who had more or less knowledge of the plot were trembling with apprehension lest they should be taken into custody, and the innocent ones were alarmed because of not knowing just how far the conspiracy might be extended.

Some feared an open battle in the city between those who favored the king and the American forces, while others listened to rumors

that all who had espoused the cause of the Colonists were to be murdered in cold blood, and such-like foolish tales were repeated from mouth to mouth until there was excitement, fear, disturbance, and almost panic among the citizens.

“Is it by making prisoners of these few that General Putnam thinks the lads may be aided?” Caleb Billings asked angrily when Stubbs stood before him.

“The arrests have not been made because of them, although that which they learned first put the general on the track of getting important information. These things would have been done this day, so I am assured, even though the boys were not in danger.”

“It is like to upset all our plans,” the boatman said moodily. “While matters were quiet I had hopes; but now it has been shown the plot is discovered, it stands to reason Governor Tryon must put them out of the way in order

to save those of the city who have been active in the matter."

"All that I grant you, Master Billings, and can but repeat that those arrests would have come at the same hour whether the boys were on board the Duchess of Gordon or safe at home. Surely you won't go back now after having given your word to do what might be toward aiding them?"

"I shall go forward, Master Stubbs, as agreed upon, although with many misgivings, for it does not seem possible our plan can be carried out at this time."

Then Billings led the way toward his boat, and, after launching her, motioned for Stubbs to take his seat in the stern sheets.

The two set out, Billings working at the oars, and when his companion would have spoken he shook his head angrily in token that he was not in a mood for conversation.

Night had fully come before the voyage was

at an end, and not until they were nearly within hailing distance of the Duchess of Gordon did Billings speak.

Then it was to say :

“It is time you laid down in the bottom of the boat, and remember that should we succeed in getting the boys aboard, and I am detained, you will pull off without me.”

“I surely shan't do so until a reasonable time has been spent in waiting.”

“That was what you agreed upon at the first, and you must hold to it, otherwise it were best we abandon the effort. There is no hope, even if we get them out of the berth, that they can be absent many moments before being discovered, and it is better they escape than that you run the risk of trying to aid me, if it so be I have fallen into difficulties.”

Stubbs made no reply to this. He understood that discussion would be worse than useless, for the old man was fully determined upon

his course of action, and arguing with him might be to provoke the abandonment of the plan.

Lying at full length in the bottom of the boat, underneath the thwarts, Stubbs was fully concealed from view, and when the little craft was hailed by the sentry on board the Duchess of Gordon, the latter would have needed sharp eyes to make out that the craft had more than one occupant.

“Boat ahoy!” came the hail, and Caleb Billings answered it by saying in a low tone:

“I would have speech with Master Smart.”

The man whom Governor Tryon had delegated as manager of the plot against General Washington was on deck, most like waiting impatiently for news from the city, and the old boatman's reception was unusually frank and cordial.

“I have been hoping you would come, Billings,” Master Smart said eagerly, as he advanced

toward the rail. "We have heard somewhat of the way affairs are going in the city and would know more."

"I cannot know worse," Billings replied moodily, as he made the boat fast, taking good care to give her sufficient length of painter, so that she might float down near about the port-hole opening from the berth which he had visited when he last saw the boys.

When Caleb gained the deck he was surrounded by a group of officers, eager to hear all he might tell, and during ten minutes or more the old man was forced to answer their many questions.

Then he was summoned below, as Stubbs, from his place of concealment, understood by the sound of his voice.

Meanwhile to the prisoners the hours had passed slowly and yet swiftly—slowly when they looked forward to hearing something which might give promise of hope, and swiftly as both

realized that when another day dawned they might be summoned to their death.

Only once since they had been confined in this berth did Master Smart visit them, and then his words were few and without cheer.

He gave the lads to understand that they had forfeited their lives by violating their oaths, and that there was little hope the punishment would be delayed.

Therefore it was that when this night came Lloyd and Dennys had believed the supreme moment was not far off, and as the door was opened neither looked up, for so great was their despondency that it did not seem possible cheering news could come to them.

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of both, when Billings said in almost a whisper:

“Now has come the time to look alive, lads. It may be possible you can escape from here through yonder porthole. If you can force

your bodies out, have no fear about the rest, for my boat lies directly underneath, and in her is Stubbs waiting to receive you. Move lively after I am gone, and remember it is better to be shot down while trying to escape than remain here to be hanged."

As he said this Billings turned to go, and the boys, catching him by the arm, would have detained him with questions but that he said hurriedly :

"It is dangerous for me to stay longer, lads. I only gained permission to come here for three minutes, pleading that I should at least be allowed to bid you good-by, and to linger would be to bring suspicion upon the whole plan. Immediately the door is locked behind me, set about forcing your bodies through the port-hole ; delay not a single instant, for every second is precious."

Then Caleb Billings went out from the room with his head bowed like one in deep distress, and

motioned for the man who had followed to give him admission to the prisoners, that the interview was at an end.

This done he went on deck, and no sooner had he appeared than he was again surrounded, as he had counted would be the case, by those who were eager to learn all the particulars concerning the events of the afternoon in the city.

In a seemingly careless manner Billings led them to that side of the ship opposite where the boys were confined, and while the officers stood in a group about him, the men were clustered as near as regulations would permit, in the hope of catching a word now and then.

Billings took especial pains to make his story entertaining, and, while he talked, scuffled back and forth as one who is exceedingly nervous might do hoping that this slight noise would serve to drown any sound which the boys might make while effecting their escape.

CHAPTER IX.

FREEDOM.

DURING perhaps ten seconds after Billings thus hurriedly left them the boys stood looking inquiringly at each other as if it was impossible for them to realize what he had said.

For several hours before his coming hope had abandoned them, and in the future they saw nothing save a disgraceful death, for both understood full well that the Americans could not, within the short time at their command, do anything toward effecting their release by force.

They were preparing themselves for what seemed to be the inevitable when the boatman entered, and now that he had gone, so quickly after speaking those words which savored of freedom, it was difficult to believe he had really

visited them—that it was not a dream conjured up by their desires.

Then suddenly, as if he had but that moment understood the words Billings spoke, Lloyd peered out through the porthole.

The night was black because of the clouds which obscured even the sky, and only after much scrutiny was it possible for him to distinguish the outlines of a boat lying close alongside the ship directly beneath his head.

He stepped back for an instant, and whispered excitedly to his comrade :

“It is all true, Dennys. For the moment I believed Caleb Billings must have lost his senses, but he has been working for our release, even though we spied upon him with the knowledge that mayhap our labors might bring him to the gallows.”

“Is the boat really there?” Dennys asked in a voice so tremulous that the words were indistinct.

“It is there, and we may escape even at the moment when it seemed all hope was lost.”

“Since noon I have been thinking that I would drop myself out of that porthole before daylight rather than allow them to kill me,” Dennys said thoughtfully, making no move toward compassing his escape. “If we should be killed now, while attempting to flee, it would be better than to remain here until they led us on deck to be hanged.”

“Why do you talk of this now?” Lloyd cried, speaking incautiously loud in his impatience and eagerness as he shook his comrade by the shoulder to arouse him to a sense of the present. “We cannot afford to linger here. Go first, and I will follow if you succeed in getting through.”

“It may be possible there will be no time for you to come—some one may see me and give the alarm, and I will not leave you behind.”

“If we should be discovered, make every

effort to escape regardless of me, for it is better one go free than both be killed."

Dennys insisted that he would not lead the way lest by some unfortunate accident they should be separated and Lloyd forced to remain behind; but his comrade was not in the mood to spend precious moments discussing the matter.

"You shall go first," he whispered vehemently, and without more ado pushed Dennys toward the porthole, and would have raised him up but that the latter said:

"I will obey since you insist upon it so strongly; but you cannot aid me in such fashion. Wait until I shall have gotten part way through, and then hold on to my feet lest I fall headlong."

It was by no means a simple matter for the lad, small though he was, to force himself through the aperture which was seemingly not large enough to permit of the passage of a child;

but when one is struggling to save his own life he can do many things which under other circumstances would seem impossible.

Regardless of the pain or of the fact that his clothing was being nearly stripped from his body—thinking only of that which was to be gained, the boy twisted, turned and pulled until the escape was so nearly accomplished that he was hanging head down against the side of the ship, while Lloyd held him by the feet.

Now was come the moment when it seemed to both the boys that they must betray their purpose, for the distance from the porthole to the skiff below was double the length of Dennys' body, and had there been none in the boat he must perforce have dropped headforemost, by which means a noise unquestionably sufficient to alarm those on deck would have been made.

Thanks to Caleb Billings' precautions, how-

ever, Stubbs was there to receive the fugitive, and Dennys' surprise was great when the soldier, reaching forward, grasped him by the shoulder, lowering him gently into the craft.

The boy would have spoken but that Stubbs' hand was pressed firmly over his mouth, and in an instant he understood the necessity for silence.

Then, motioning to the lad that he should fend the boat off lest she strike violently against the side of the ship, Stubbs stood upon the thwarts ready to receive Lloyd.

The second prisoner occupied considerably more time in forcing his way outward than did the first; but yet no more than sixty seconds had elapsed since the moment Dennys first began his efforts at escape before the two were crouching in the bottom of the boat, free, yet not daring to believe it might be possible they could take advantage of their freedom.

Now was come the time when Stubbs should

have pushed off, according to the command given by Billings; but yet he lingered.

The boatman's voice could be heard now and then as he continued his recital of the startling events which had occurred in the city during the afternoon, and the lads wondered why he lingered when it might reasonably be supposed their escape would be discovered within a few moments.

All three were crouching in the bottom of the boat, not daring to sit or stand upright, lest they might be seen from the deck, and as they crouched thus closely together, Lloyd whispered:

“Why does Billings delay?”

“It was his intention to sacrifice himself for you lads in order that our plans might be more certain of success. He is talking with the crew of the ship, while thinking we are pulling away, and does so in the firm belief that his death will result.”

“But we must not leave him,” Dennys whispered excitedly. “He shall not give himself up for us. What hinders his coming?”

“Only that he believed by remaining on board there was less likelihood the Britishers would look for you.”

“Can you not summon him?”

“No one knows he had a companion in the boat, and I dare not.”

As a matter of fact Paul Stubbs had no idea what course to pursue. There was only in his mind the one thought that he would not desert this man who had been so faithful to the boys, even though he was concerned in the conspiracy against the commander-in-chief, and instead of casting the boat adrift he remained in painful indecision, expecting each moment to hear the alarm which should tell that the escape of the lads was discovered.

Although anticipating such a signal he was surprised that it came so quickly.

He had hardly ceased speaking to his companions when a loud shout was heard from between decks, followed by the hurried trampling of feet, and the trembling fugitives knew well its meaning.

Now it would have been madness for Stubbs to hold the boat alongside another instant, and he cast off the painter, allowing her to drift slowly astern.

The uproar on the ship increased each second, and while the lads were yet within earshot they heard the order given to "lower away the boats," and almost at the same instant another voice cried:

"Where is Billings? Where is Billings? I am told he had permission to visit the prisoners a moment ago."

This question was no more than asked before a light splash on the water could be distinguished amid the medley of voices, and Paul Stubbs whispered excitedly:

“Billings has at last got his wits about him and is overboard. Get out the oars with as little noise as possible, lads, while I stand by to help the old man into the boat, or swim to his rescue if needed.”

Even in the darkness, while obeying the order, Lloyd and Dennys could see the soldier hurriedly removing his clothing, and knew he would imperil his life to save that of the man who had afforded them such timely aid.

Then came from the deck of the ship the command for the soldiers to fall in line along the starboard rail, and following it was heard the words, even before the men were in position:

“The prisoners are swimming ashore! Look well about you, and fire at every suspicious object!”

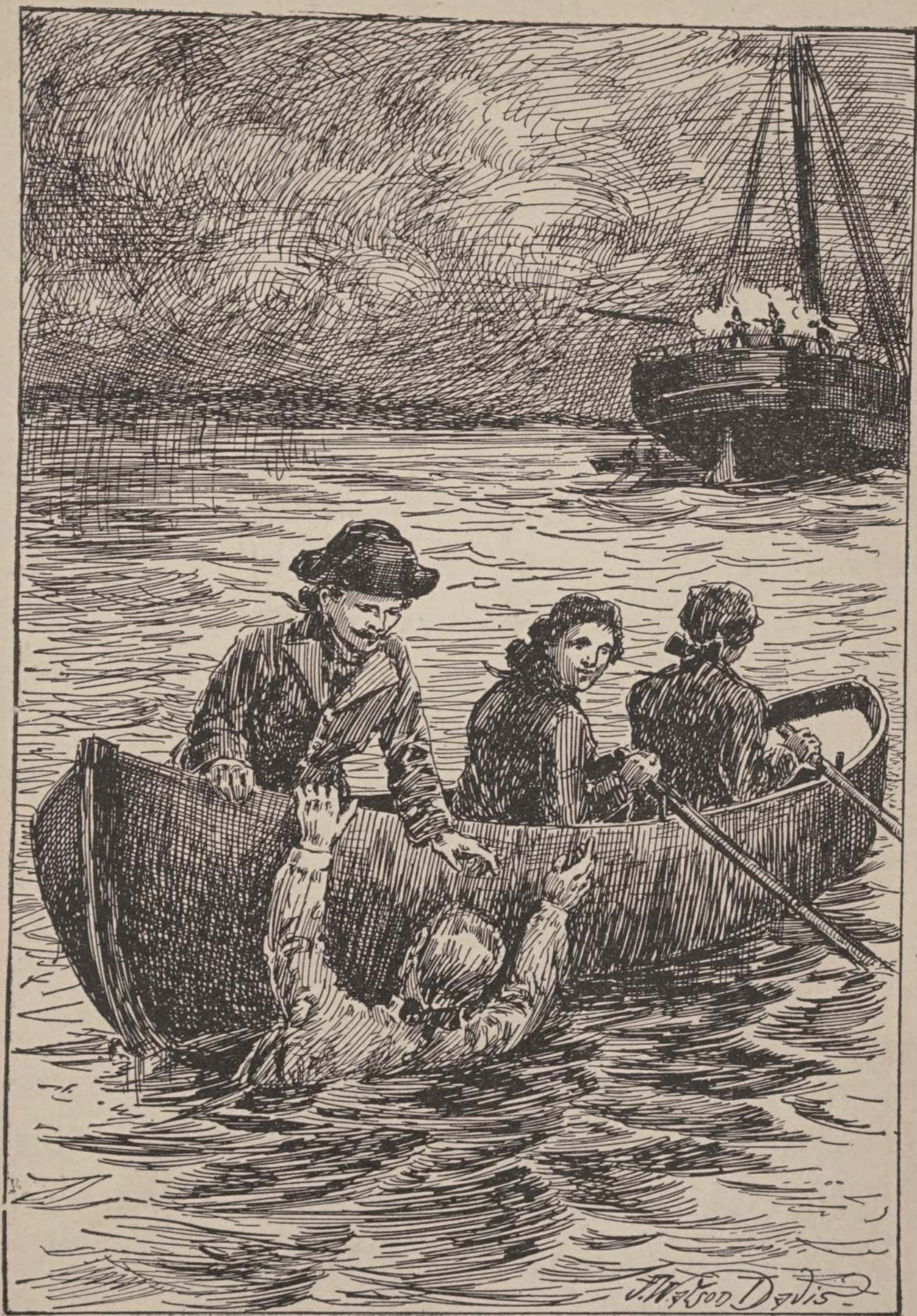
Eager to “deal death to a rebel,” the soldiers were more zealous than skillful, and the command had hardly been given when a dozen or more muskets were discharged in a volley.

The sudden and faint lighting up of the water from the flashes of the guns revealed to Stubbs the head of Billings, who was swimming with the current, knowing full well the boat must have drifted in that direction, and it also told the fugitive how near were friends.

Even at this short distance the little boat must have been totally obscured from view of those on the ship by the dense darkness; yet should a musket be fired astern there might be sufficient light from the burning powder to reveal the whereabouts of the swimmer, and in this did his greatest danger lie.

Now it was when fortune had thus far favored those who would escape from Governor Tryon's clutches that she suddenly deserted them.

Billings, through carelessness, or in a moment of weakness, splashed the water ever so lightly, but causing so much of noise as to warn those on the ship, who were listening intently in the hope that some such sound might be made.



A scattering volley was sent toward the fugitives; the bullets singing directly above their heads.—Page 217.

Then came the command :

“Aft, aft, men ! Here is one of your prisoners ! Let two or three fire directly astern, and the others be ready to aim at whatsoever object they see.”

Stubbs leaned over the bow of the boat, ready to catch the old man so soon as he should come near, while Lloyd and Dennys, each holding an oar, were prepared to pull at the first welcome word which told they were at liberty to seek safety in flight.

The order on the ship was obeyed.

There came four flashes of light, and, dim though it was, the illumination sufficed to reveal the target.

There was little opportunity for accurate aim ; but the boat had been seen, and if the man in the water was not hit those who were ready to aid him might be disabled.

Now a scattering volley was sent toward the fugitives, the bullets singing directly above

their heads, and, as it seemed to the lads, within a few inches; but fortunately no one was hurt, and while the soldiers were reloading their pieces the heavy splashing of water told that the boats had been lowered.

“Now are we done for,” Lloyd heard Stubbs mutter, and then the little skiff rocked to and fro violently, as he seized Billings by the shoulder, attempting to draw him over the rail.

“Have a care, or you will swamp the craft,” the boatman said, speaking with difficulty because of his heavy breathing. “Let me come in by the bow, and all will be well. It will be a sharp pull for us, if we get the best of those boats, some of which will have twenty oars out.”

Now it was Lloyd and Dennys began their work, even before the old man was fully aboard, and, pulling the boat obliquely across toward the Jersey shore, that they might gain the full benefit of the current and at the same

time creep away from what would naturally be supposed their direct course, they lay to their oars as only lads can who know life or death hangs in the balance.

By the time Billings had scrambled in over the bow, Stubbs had taken his seat by the side of Dennys, and was adding his strength to that of the boys.

Then the old man, who perchance, could have sent the craft ahead at as great speed as the three of them combined, laid hold with Lloyd, and the skiff sent the spray high above the bow as she dashed swiftly ahead under the impetus thus given.

“If the Duchess of Gordon was a man-of-war, instead of only an armed ship, our chances would be even smaller than they are,” Billings said after he had taken a dozer strokes. “Sailors of the English navy would have launched their boats in less time than it took the redcoats to discharge their muskets; but these mongrels are

not as ready, and it may be we shall give them the slip yet."

By this time the soldiers were firing again, and the tiny flashes of light were as useless as the bullets were harmless, for they illumined the water but a short distance from the ship, and only served to show to the fugitives in what direction the boats were proceeding.

Now Billings urged the skiff further round toward the Jersey shore, as he whispered:

"Not a word now, and be careful how you use the oars. The Britishers are pulling straight down with the current, and once we can land all is well."

Freedom was not to be gained, however, without excessive labor, and, to all save Caleb Billings himself, this strain at the oars with the full strength of every muscle, was exhausting; but yet the boys held to the task knowing the reward to be gained, until under other circum-

stances they must have dropped, literally insensible with fatigue.

During what seemed a very long time could they hear the voices of the followers, and the shouts of command from one boat to another; but to cheer them was the knowledge that at each moment were the outcries growing fainter, telling that the pursued were on an entirely different course from that taken by the pursuers.

Not until it was no longer possible to hear a single voice did the old man suggest that the boys and Stubbs cease their rowing, leaving him to take care for the remainder of the flight.

“There is no need of overexerting ourselves now,” he said, speaking in a low tone. “I will answer for it that none of those fellows overhaul us; but it stands to reason that other boats were sent out from the ship later, and we may come across them, even though it seems we are near to being safe.”

“Why not pull straight for the city?” Stubbs asked. “Once there I will answer for it the Britishers don’t lay hands on us.”

“I am allowing that the officers of that ’ere ship had sense enough to send some of the other boats to cut us off in that direction, and it would be putting our heads into the plainest kind of a trap if we were to make a try for the town.”

“Where do you count on going just now?”

“We will land wherever we can, and after daylight comes, when it is possible to see whether enemies be about, then will be the time to make for the city. I was fearing you could not get through the portholes, lads.”

“It was a hard squeeze,” Lloyd replied with a long-drawn sigh of relief; “but knowing what awaited us, if forced to remain on board the ship, we could have pulled through a smaller hole.”

“That I warrant you, lads, for a man may do many things when a rope from the yardarm is like soon to be around his neck.”

Now it was Dennys bethought himself of what harm to the colony might result from this escape of theirs, and he asked tremulously:

“Is it possible the conspirators may attempt to carry out their plans since it is known we have had information concerning them?”

“As one who was concerned in that same plot, I can answer you with a big ‘no,’” Billings replied. “From all I can hear some one else has forsworn himself by giving information regarding what would have been done, and no less than a dozen are already in jail.”

“When was that done?” Lloyd asked in surprise.

“Early this afternoon, and you may be sure that the excitement in the city is great. I am thinking one Caleb Billings will be looked for next. It is true I had not as important a part as Master Forbes, Master Matthews, or even Thomas Hickey; but yet was I a go-between.”

“I have the same as General Putnam’s word

that any who might aid in this work should be rewarded," Stubbs interrupted. "You may be certain that Caleb Billings' name will not be on the list of those who are searched after."

"Of course it could not be after what he has done," Dennys said emphatically, and the old boatman replied as he shook his head slowly:

"When a man falls into evil ways, lads, he must pay the penalty, and I will not be feeling in any ways wronged if there is no account taken of this night's work. I did all I might to save you two from death because, had you been hanged, in my mind the blood would have been on my own head. I want to say once more and for the last time, because I am not counting on pleading overly hard for mercy, that when I joined what you call the conspiracy it was with the belief that nothing dishonorable would be done. I never threw my lines in with the Colonists, for there was some among them that didn't strike my fancy, and if the

king could have put down the rebellion as a king should, in honorable warfare, I'd like to have seen it done. Now whether I go to jail, where I belong, or am allowed to run free, I shall take my stand among those who would make this country an independent nation."

CHAPTER X.

A STERN CHASE.

THAT the fugitives believed they had given their enemies—and those on board the Duchess of Gordon could be called by no other name—the slip, was proven by the fact that even now, while hardly more than beyond hail of the armed ship, they indulged in conversation regarding the future.

Every occupant of Caleb Billings' boat knew beyond peradventure that his life was the forfeit of being taken prisoner; for after having embarked in such a plot Governor Tryon would not hesitate at hanging or shooting a dozen men rather than allow proof of his complicity to be made public.

As a matter of fact, it had become necessary to the safety of no less than six hundred persons in New York that those who had taken part in the daring escape should be apprehended, and the boys knew, as well as did Paul Stubbs and Caleb Billings, that every effort would be made to effect their capture; but success had rendered them overconfident, and while yet within range of the king's ship did they hold such converse as was best adapted to unquestioned safety.

It was Lloyd who first called attention to the fact that it might be well to make certain they were no longer within the power of those who had a secret to guard; and this he did by suggesting mildly, for it did not seem to him right he should appear as if dictating to men who had so recently saved his life:

“Would it not be better that we made sure of gaining the shore on one side or the other before speaking at any length? There are many

in New York, who most likely have not as yet been suspected, who would aid Governor Tryon in capturing us, that their own safety might be assured; and with so many enemies we are not safe until having gained a shelter among those of our own army who can be trusted."

"I reckon you may be right, lad," Caleb Billings said with a sudden movement, as if he had but just come to view the matter in such a light. "If I stood in Governor Tryon's shoes, every boat belonging to the Duchess of Gordon would be scouring these waters in search of us."

Although speaking in such a strain the old boatman did not take up the oars, and after waiting for him to set the example, Dennys asked:-

"Why then do you remain idle, Master Billings? Surely we are far from secure against pursuit, being not above half a mile from the ship."

“I can’t rightly answer that question, lad,” and the old man took up the oars mechanically, rather than with such a spirit as one would naturally expect him to display. “I’ve done a power of thinkin’ aboard Governor Tryon’s ship this night, and much which seemed to me right twenty-four hours ago now looks like a crime. It may be well that I take my place among those who are likely to answer for their share in the plot, since my guilt is none the less than theirs.”

“Now you are talking that which is folly!” Paul Stubbs said sharply. “But for your plan these boys would be very near death, with none to lend a helping hand; and if such work as had been done since sunset doesn’t count, then are all of us like to be in hard lines when a final reckoning comes. I have Genera Putnam’s word that whosoever should aid me in the work of rescuing them might go free, so far as the friends of freedom are concerned, and

with that promise you have no reason to fear evil.”

“I know in my heart, however, all that I might have had a hand in the doing; and it is not right one like me goes free when others, less guilty, are forced to suffer for the same crime.”

The old boatman was laboring under a most severe attack from his conscience, and it might prove the undoing of all unless checked without loss of time; for it was necessary his head should be clear if the late prisoners on board the *Duchess of Gordon* escaped those who were most eager to silence their tongues.

All this Paul Stubbs understood full well, as indeed did the boys; and he set about the task knowing it must be accomplished in the least possible space of time.

“Of what avail is your remorse, Billings, if you suffer these lads to be made prisoners again? You know full well that once we are overtaken

every one will be silenced forever, and without loss of time, lest there should be an opportunity to bear witness against those who are now in custody."

"It is well I paid the penalty of my crimes," the boatman replied moodily.

"And in order to work out your own expiation, you propose that these lads and myself, who are innocent of the crime of conspiracy, be made to suffer with you?"

"What more is it possible for a man to do?" Billings asked, with a vacant stare. "I was ready to sacrifice my life for them!"

"Ay, and worked the scheme like a man; but have now turned child at the very moment when a clear head is needed. Make certain these lads are set ashore in safety, and then we will listen to your self-reproaches, feeling that they are sincere."

Even this failed to arouse the old man from the apathy into which he had so suddenly fallen;

and it is impossible to say what might have been the ending of the perilous venture but for a dangerous diversion which occurred at this moment.

From out of the darkness came the creaking of oars, and on the same instant could be heard the sound of voices in earnest conversation :

“I tell you that an old boatman like Billings would not have attempted to pull straight for the town, more especially after the flashing of the muskets showed us his boat. He has turned and is making for the Jersey shore, or I'll eat my head.”

Then, and even while the fugitives sat motionless, as if paralyzed by the imminence of the danger, another voice replied :

“Surely, we are come far enough in this direction. There could have been no more than two pairs of oars in his boat, and we should have overhauled him by this time.”

“Who can say that we are not already be-

tween them and the shore? The lives of many who have this day been put under arrest depend upon our efforts now; and I am not minded to give over the pursuit while it seems possible we may yet overtake the spies and traitors!"

"Keep on, then, until you have satisfied yourself that an old hand like our renegade boatman needs only such darkness as this in order to give us the slip, and after that has been done we may consider our own positions. Even though on board the king's ship, there will not be overly much safety for us once the people come to know that we would have killed or taken prisoner the general whom they worship."

As this last voice ceased the fugitives could see, hardly more than a dozen yards away, the outlines of a boat, and for the moment it appeared to Lloyd and Dennys as if there was little chance for their final escape.

The occupants of the boat would shoot with intent to kill immediately after discovering

them, and at such short range there was poor hope all the bullets might miss the target.

It seemed almost as dangerous to take up the oars as to remain motionless, for the lightest noise would be heard by the pursuers; and the two lads were literally frozen with fear until Master Billings, recovering his presence of mind with the knowledge that deadly danger was close at hand, took measures for their safety.

The old man suddenly forgot the reproachings of his conscience in the realization that, perhaps, the lives of all his companions depended upon himself, and on the instant was once more the cool, calculating boatman.

He had not shipped his oars when beginning the conversation, and now dipped them in the water so silently that it seemed even to the strained, eager ears of the two boys as if not the lightest sound was made, pulling with all his strength at right angles with the course of the oncoming boat.

In a twinkling the pursuers were lost to view in the darkness; but certain it was that they had either seen or heard something which aroused suspicion, for immediately came the command, the words sounding clear and distinct to Lloyd and Dennys as if they had been uttered by some one on board their own craft:

“Have a care! Make ready! Fire at the first sound or sight!”

On the instant three muskets were discharged, apparently at random, for none of the balls came in the direction of the fugitives; but the glare of the burning powder so illumined the scene that Billings' boat stood out well defined.

Now had the chase begun in earnest. The boat from the Duchess of Gordon, in command of one who understood full well how necessary it was the young spies should be captured, was not more than a dozen yards distant, and by firing a volley every moment it would be possible to keep the fugitives in view.

“Pull for your lives!” Billings said in a hoarse whisper, and almost at the same instant could be heard the command of the king’s officer.

“Bend to your oars, men, and we’ll have them! Ready with your muskets, and fire even at a shadow; for it’s better to waste a little ammunition than allow the spies to escape us!”

Nothing more was need to incite the fugitives to their utmost efforts; but even under the most favorable circumstance it did not seem possible they could make good their escape now that the enemy had discovered their whereabouts.

Lloyd and Dennys were bending to one oar, while Paul Stubbs worked another, and Caleb Billings was giving evidence of his strength and endurance as he plied a pair, when the Britishers fired another volley, thus lighting up the surrounding waters until both crafts stood out clear and distinct amid the darkness.

“Now that the target has been shown, you

who have reserved your fire should be able to take aim," the king's officer in charge of the boat cried; and had his previous orders been obeyed it is reasonable to believe the fugitives might have been disabled; but, fortunately for those who were working against the plot, the soldiers had failed to execute the commands.

Every man discharged his weapon at the same instant, and there were no loaded muskets left with which to take advantage of the opportunity.

A cry of anger from the British officer sounded like sweetest music in the ears of those who were so near death, and then came the sharply spoken order:

"Reload! Then, as soon as may be, let two fire in order to give us a glimpse of the boat, the others waiting until getting a view of the spies before discharging their muskets. By such means it should be possible to so cripple them that the chase cannot be prolonged."

Now, it seemed to Lloyd, had come the most dangerous moment, for if the soldiers carried out the order faithfully there was little chance it would be possible to avoid a disaster.

“Pull, Dennys, pull!” he whispered hoarsely. “It don’t stand to reason that we’ll have many more chances, and we must make the most of this!”

It can well be understood that Dennys would have exerted all his strength even without such reminder that death was very near; and, under the impetus of the fugitives’ united efforts, the little craft shot ahead like an arrow, swerved from the course by Billings, who swung her sharply around to starboard.

The time necessary for the men to reload was sufficient to give the pursued a decided advantage in this renewal of the chase, for their boat had been pulled in a different direction, and when three of the soldiers fired there was nothing to greet their gaze.

“The rebels have swung around!” the British officer cried in a rage. “Fire in the opposite direction!”

The remainder of the squad obeyed this command, and, as a matter of course, when the flash of their weapons revealed the fugitives, no one was able to take advantage of the sight.

The officer discharged his pistol almost at random, and Billings said in a whisper, as he pulled the light skiff around on another course:

“Now is our time! Row for your lives, an’ by the time those bunglers get ready to fire again we should be out of sight!”

In this game of hide and seek each second was of greatest value, as the occupants of the skiff understood; and every muscle was strained to its utmost tension during the two or three moments while the soldiers were making ready for another effort.

By this time the fugitives were so far away that the feeble glare from the discharge of the

muskets failed to reveal them, and once more did it seem certain the escape had been accomplished.

“Don’t slacken your stroke,” Paul Stubbs whispered, after this last fruitless effort on the part of the enemy. “We can’t afford to take any chances now, but must make certain of giving them the slip!”

Neither Lloyd nor Dennys had any idea of taking a rest while the Britishers were so near, and Master Billings had so far recovered from his fit of despondency as to be in condition to take advantage of every opportunity the enemy might give him.

The little skiff was forced through the water at a rate of speed which she had probably never equaled before, and far in the rear could be heard the king’s officer scolding his men for their stupidity.

“Shall we make a try for the New York shore?” Caleb Billings asked after a brief

silence; and Paul Stubbs replied in a tone of one who has taken command of the party:

“It would be folly to attempt anything of the kind. There is no knowing how many who have been concerned in the plot are abroad this night awaiting an opportunity to hide their guilt by another crime, and we are not warranted in taking any chance. Let us make for the Jersey shore and there stop until daylight, when we can come across with less fear of an attack.”

“Those who are leagued with Governor Tryon would not hesitate at making an attack even in the light of day,” Billings said grimly. “I never fully understood to what this plot might lead; but now it doesn’t need that a man should have two eyes in order to know how desperate are become those who are yet at liberty.”

“We shall be in less danger during the day than in the darkness,” the soldier replied quickly. “Many a man would shoot us down when it

might be done without witnesses, who would be harmless as a lamb while the sun was shining. We'll take our chances on the Jersey shore until after sunrise and then pull across as might any other honest citizen. Unless I'm much mistaken, the ringleaders in this plot will have been taken care of by that time, and we need have little fear concerning what the more timorous will try to compass."

It was reasonable to suppose that every boat belonging to the Duchess of Gordon was out searching for those who had escaped being murdered, and no one might say in which direction they were, therefore no slight amount of caution was necessary, even now after it seemed as if the fugitives were safe from capture.

Certain it was they could point out positively the location of one of the enemy's boats, for the officer who had been so near taking them prisoners continued to busy his men with loading and discharging their weapons in the hope,

most likely, of discovering the spies by aid of the flashes of light, and it was only necessary they should give this craft a wide berth.

“If the others who are after us would lose their heads as badly as that Britisher appears to have done, we need have little anxiety,” Paul Stubbs said, with a chuckle of satisfaction, and Caleb Billings did much toward allaying the fears of the boys by adding in a tone of conviction:

“I’ll go bail there is no one between here an’ the Jersey shore to trouble us. Any craft that was roundabout when the men began firing at me after I jumped overboard, would have pulled up to learn the meaning of the excitement, an’ them as remained away were friends, most likely; that is, if there were any afloat to remain away. It’s a case of rowing across at our own pace, so long as that crazy Britisher keeps on telling us where he is, an’ finding such a lodging there as seems most comfortable.”

“We were feeling quite as confident when yonder craft came within hailing distance, therefore it is best not to crow until we are well out of the woods,” Lloyd suggested, and Dennys added, with a perceptible tremor in his voice:

“I had rather wait until we’re safe at home once more before bragging about being able to keep clear of the Britishers, and even then I shan’t feel any too secure, knowing as we do that five hundred or more citizens will charge us with being spies!”

“There is but one thing you lads can do, after this trouble is over,” Stubbs said quietly. “Enlist in whatever branch of the service strikes your fancy, and then you’ll be among those who can appreciate the work you have done. Advancement should be rapid for such as you, and New York won’t be a pleasant abiding place for some time to come.”

“And if it so be they’re not ashamed to have me claim ’em as friends, I shall go with them,”

Caleb Billings said emphatically. "I did think nothing would tempt me to enlist for a soldier; but after this wickedness of mine it's about the only way to prove myself an honest man. The city won't be overly pleasant for me, after this night, especially if it should turn out as Master Stubbs has said, that my part in the plot is to be kept a secret, and I'd best follow them whose lives I've had a hand in saving."

"Will you do it?" Lloyd cried excitedly. "Nothing could be better than that you signed the rolls with us, and if any reward is to be given in the shape of advancement, surely you should have a full share, Master Billings, because, but for you, Dennys and I would either be dead at this moment, or so near the end as to be much the same thing."

"Think you that one who joined in a plot to capture the commander in chief would be allowed in the army?" the boatman asked of Paul Stubbs, and the latter replied heartily:

“I am certain of it. Once General Putnam learns that it is your desire to serve the Cause as a soldier, he will see to it every opportunity is offered, and if it so chance you three enlist, in the company to which I belong, it shall be my care to make certain no man says in your hearing other than what is agreeable.”

“I for one pledge my word on it,” Caleb Billings said, leaning forward with outstretched hand as if thus to ratify his promise. “As soon as may be after we step foot on the New York side I’ll set my name down to serve so long as the colonists hold out against the king.”

It was to all who had so lately been near unto death as if this agreement to become soldiers afforded a certain degree of security, and on the instant all grew more cheerful, seeming to see promise in the future of safety, and freedom from fear that those who had been in the plot, but were not discovered, would work any injury.

Now it was that Caleb Billings headed his boat directly for the Jersey shore.

Far away in the darkness could be seen now and then the flashing of the British soldiers' muskets as they thus vainly attempted to illumine the waters, and there was no fear that particular boat's crew would be able to effect anything in the way of a capture.

When the fugitives were arrived at the opposite bank, Paul Stubbs suggested that they make no effort at finding a lodging place during the short time of darkness which yet remained.

"It must be within an hour of sunrise, and we may as well remain where we are," he said. "No great amount of repose can be gained by a short nap, and, feeling as I do at present, it would be impossible to close my eyes in slumber while the width of the harbor separates me from those on whom I can rely."

His companions were in much the same way

of thinking, and therefore it was that the little party remained in Caleb Billings' boat, or walked on the shore now and then within hail, until the sun showed his face above the eastern horizon.

Lloyd and Dennys were eager to set out immediately the new day had dawned; but the soldier and the boatman objected to such an early start, arguing that safety would best be assured by waiting until the harbor was well filled with craft, and among them boats sent out by General Putnam to search for the missing ones, when there was little fear Governor Tryon would dare proceed to extremities.

Therefore it was that they remained partially screened by the foliage until fully seven o'clock in the morning, when, to the great relief of Lloyd and Dennys, Master Billings gave the signal to begin the return journey, by saying:

“If we can't get across safely now, it can never be done; so let's make the try, lads.”

CHAPTER XI.

SAFE.

It can well be imagined that from the moment the light of the morning sun illumined the waters, Caleb Billings and his companions kept a sharp lookout on the Duchess of Gordon, which ship lay two miles or more away.

It was not possible to say, from that distance, what was being done on the decks of the king's vessel; but the watchers were able to determine whether any boat came to or went from her to the city, and thus might they form a reasonably correct conclusion as to whether the conspirators were in such frame of mind as to make an attempt at capture in the open day.

“All the boats are hoisted inboard, an' it looks

much to me as if Governor Tryon had got things into shape for runnin' away in case the Continentals can muster force enough to attack the Duchess," Caleb Billings said, after a long survey of the armed ship. "Accordin' to my thinkin', he ain't feelin' over an' above comfortable in mind just at this time; an' I'll warrant he don't dare send a boat's crew after us, however near we might pull toward him."

One would have said that the king's vessel was ready to get under way at a moment's notice, and it was observed, during such time as the fugitives watched her, that no boat approached from the city.

"Those who were concerned in the plot, and yet remain at liberty, are keeping under cover," Paul Stubbs said in a tone of satisfaction. "I'll warrant we won't see one of them for some days to come, unless it be that they visit headquarters for the purpose of making it appear they are true to the cause."

Lloyd and Dennys did not take part in such speculations. Both the lads were thinking of their parents, knowing full well in what distress of mind they were.

Not since gaining permission to act the part of spies had the boys returned home, and certain it was that many in the city realized the peril to which they were exposed; therefore in at least two households did grief and anxiety reign, not to be lessened until it was known beyond peradventure that Governor Tryon had lost his prisoners.

Had the lads been consulted, they would have declared in favor of pulling across to the city when the day first dawned, regardless of possible danger; but neither Caleb Billings nor Paul Stubbs were of the mind to take any unnecessary risks; and the little boat lay half concealed among the foliage on the Jersey shore until the old boatman announced that the passage might be attempted.

Once the fugitives were afloat again, and forced to row within plain sight of their enemies, it is safe to say that not one of them breathed freely until they had passed the Duchess of Gordon, nearing the fort.

Only then did either member of the party speak, and Dennys, drawing a long breath of relief, exclaimed:

“It begins to seem as if we might get home in safety, and how good it will be! Death has been so near since Hickey took us prisoners that it is almost as if we had been in the grave and were come to life again.”

“That’s mighty nigh what it amounts to, lads,” Caleb Billings replied emphatically. “When Master Stubbs first hailed me, I allowed there was nobody in this ’ere colony as could save you.”

“Except yourself,” Lloyd said feelingly; “and certain it is that you risked everything to lend a helping hand.”

“Considerin’ that I’d been concerned in the plot, it wasn’t very much to take my life in my hands, for bein’ shot while tryin’ to escape from his majesty’s officers would have been an easy death compared with bein’ hanged.”

“Both those dangers are passed now, my friend,” Paul Stubbs said heartily, observing that the old man was relapsing into despondency again. “It will never be known, save by those concerned in the plot, that you ever dreamed of working an injury to the colonies, and that I’ll answer for on the word of General Putnam.”

“We’ll trust so, Master Stubbs—we’ll trust so,” the old man replied with a sigh; “but yet there’s not overly much hope in my mind just now. An old fellow like me, without influence and of no weight in the city, stands a good chance of being made to bear the biggest portion of others’ sins; and certain it is some one must be punished for the plot, if for no other reason than to prevent its being tried over again.”

There was no further opportunity to cheer the repentant man, for by this time the occupants of the boat had been recognized by several among the large throng of people that lined the harbor front in the immediate vicinity of the fort, and a great shout went up, as if the coming of these men and boys gave joy to all.

“They have mistaken us for others; but who of so much importance has been missing from the city?” Dennys asked in perplexity.

“None but yourselves, lads,” Paul Stubbs replied, whereat Dennys’ bewilderment became greater than before.

“There are few who know us, and I’ll answer for it that the people wouldn’t put themselves out to any extent for such as Lloyd and me.”

“That’s where you are mistaken, my boy,” the soldier replied with a laugh. “Listen, and you will understand that all these people have gathered here especially to learn if you have come safely away from the Duchess of Gordon.”

The boys were silent for an instant, during which time they heard their names repeated again and again, until there could be no question as to the truth of Paul Stubbs' statement.

"I don't understand it!" Lloyd exclaimed.

"It is easy of explanation. There can be no question but the people understand by this time that a plot has been discovered against General Washington, and you were concerned in the unearthing of it. I have no doubt but that it was well known you had been carried by force on board the Duchess of Gordon, and the citizens are anxious concerning your safety."

"If that much is public news, then it must be known that I should be blamed for their danger," Caleb Billings muttered half to himself; and at that very instant could be heard the cry from those on shore :

"The boatman has not only saved them, but his own life! That is the man, he who pulls the after oars! Huzza for Billings!"

“There is your answer,” Paul Stubbs said with a laugh. “You can well understand now that General Putnam has kept his word, and none of those eager ones so much as suspect that you had any hand in the danger which menaced the lads.”

Five minutes later the boat's bow was run up on the sand near the fort, and a hundred or more excited citizens clustered around as the little party stepped ashore, each man eager to clasp by the hand those who had escaped from their enemies.

Early though the hour was, before having gotten so far as Bowling Green the fugitives were literally surrounded by a throng of people, and Caleb Billings received good proof that his name had not been given out as being among the conspirators, when both men and women thanked him and Stubbs again and again for the heroic part they had taken in rescuing the lads.

Of Lloyd's and Dennys' reception at home there is no reason why any word should be written. One can well imagine the warmth of affection with which they were greeted, after understanding that their danger had been known to all.

It is enough to say that they went to their parents without loss of time, immediately it was possible to free themselves from the citizens who seemed to think it a bounden duty to offer congratulations; and when the lads parted from Paul Stubbs and Caleb Billings, it was with the knowledge that the old boatman would remain with the soldier until such time as some definite arrangements could be made concerning his future welfare.

As to all the details of the plot against the commander in chief of the American forces, the success of which might have ended the war for liberty ere yet it was well begun, it is not necessary here to speak, since historians have

dealt with it fairly, and at length. It is only the purpose of this tale to show that the first intimation which was had of the conspiracy came from these two lads who have figured here, and not solely from that member of Washington's guard who, growing timorous, revealed the part he would have taken.

It is impossible, owing to lack of authentic detail, to follow the fortunes of Lloyd and Dennys from the day they were received so warmly at Bowling Green by the citizens of New York, until they finally entered the Continental Army as favored recruits; but among the material from which this tale has been woven is found an account of their doings on that 27th of June, when the loyal people assembled in "a field near the Bowery" to witness the execution of Thomas Hickey for conspiring to kill the commander of the American armies.

There had been no public trial of the con-

spirators; in fact, the curious and excited public had not been allowed to know very much concerning the plot, lest a knowledge that such a crime had been contemplated might serve as encouragement for others to make a like attempt.

Perhaps Lloyd and Dennys knew more regarding the action of the military authorities than any others outside of the army, and for the reason that Paul Stubbs kept them well informed of what he learned from day to day.

Jacob Chandler was tried by court-martial on the day following the escape of the boys; and, thanks to the fact that Stubbs had seen the letter sent to him by Master Smart, neither of those who had acted as messengers were called upon for testimony.

The faint-hearted but evil-inclined soldier was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and few among the citizens of New York had any clear idea of the crime with which he was charged.

What may have been done toward punishing the more prominent and influential men who had taken part in the dastardly conspiracy will never be clearly known; but certain it is they mended their ways for a certain time.

Thomas Hickey was adjudged more culpable than many another, not only because of his being a soldier in the Guard, but owing to the fact that he had been using every effort to seduce other members of the army; and, after a fair trial, during which both Lloyd and Dennys were forced to act as witnesses, he was sentenced to be hanged.

An execution in the year 1776 was something which attracted, rather than repelled, the public; and on this 27th day of June the streets of New York were filled with citizens of all classes, who were making their way with more or less eagerness, toward that country road known as the Bowery.

Business was suspended, that apprentice as

well as clerk might witness the spectacle of a man being launched into eternity as earthly expiation of his crimes ; and more than one carried a basket of food, for the arrival of the condemned might be delayed, and thus would a need arise for refreshments if the curious were not disposed to lose an advantageous position from which could be seen all the details in the horrible scene.

In the rear of these hurrying, eager citizens, walking slowly as if to avoid arriving at the gallows-field in time to witness the punishment, were four persons with whom the reader has already been made acquainted—Paul Stubbs, Caleb Billings, Lloyd Dacre and Dennys Howland.

It was as if every person who saw them had some remark of a friendly nature to make ; and whenever they were accosted these four halted, much as though willing to embrace every opportunity of losing time.

“I fail to understand why it is that reputable citizens can be so eager to see a human being sent into the next world at the end of a rope,” Dennys said to Paul Stubbs, as an acquaintance, with his wife and four children, hurried past with a cheery salutation, and a remark to the effect that he “would like to linger for a bit of gossip, but that he feared all the best locations would be occupied, and he thus deprived of an opportunity to see his just deserts dealt out to a villain.”

“It is certain that neither of us would be walking toward the Bowery this day but for General Putnam’s positive command to such effect,” the soldier replied moodily.

“But why should we be forced to look upon that which is horrible? Surely Hickey has caused us so much suffering that we might have been spared a view of him as he is being sent before his Maker.”

“I suppose the general believes we should be

present because of the fact that he would have compassed our death had it been possible. A soldier ought never to shrink from a view of suffering in any form, and yet I am hoping we may arrive after it is over."

"I can echo that wish, Master Stubbs," Caleb Billings added emphatically. "It will be much as if I was assistin' at my own execution, for, had it not been for you three, I might have been standin' by Hickey's side this day."

"Now you are coming back to the same song which we have forbidden you to sing," Lloyd said, with a certain sharpness in his tone. "You are not there, and your own good heart would have prevented your going too far in the plot. It is enough now that you have set your name down as a soldier, and we will hear no more about what might have been. Within two weeks we shall all be in uniform, sworn to fight for the colonies, and ready to unearth any plot against the commander-in-chief."

Then the four walked on in silence during several moments, being alone on the road, for the eagerly curious ones had passed beyond view, and, perhaps, in order to occupy yet more time, Lloyd began speculating as to what fortune might befall them when they were companions in arms, on the march, or in battle.

Caleb Billings recovered a certain portion of his usual cheerfulness while discussing these possibilities; and the little party lingered so long on the way that they were not yet where a view of the field could be had when the rolling of drums told that the last act in the plot was being played.

“That marks the moment of Hickey’s death!” Paul Stubbs said, in a tone of solemnity, as he removed his hat, the others following the example. “We have obeyed orders, so far as coming in this direction is concerned, and it may never be known but that we stood where all the details of his death might have been witnessed.

We will wait here until the returning throng forces us back, and from this day try to forget that such a member of the Guard ever had an existence."

Not until the sightseers came down the road did either of the little party so much as speak, and then, during an hour or more, were they forced to receive and reply to congratulations upon the good work which had been done in thus bringing to justice one who would have worked the colonies the deadliest harm that could have come upon them.

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As to what reward was given Lloyd and Dennys for their part in frustrating the Tory plot it is impossible to write. We only know that in the year 1777 they, together with Caleb Billings, were in the army as privates, and shortly afterward the two lads were made lieutenants but more than that cannot be learned.

THE END.



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