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ONE THOUSAND MEN FOR A
CHRISTMAS PRESENT



THE CAPTURE OF THE HESSIANS.

ONE THOUSAND MEN

FOR A

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

BY

MARY B. SHELDON

Illustrated by

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BOSTON
ESTES AND LAURIAT
1898



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ONE THOUSAND MEN FOR A CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

A MEDIUM-SIZED boy and a very large dog were going rapidly along the river road towards Trenton.

“Colonel!” exclaimed the boy, suddenly, “how do you like New Jersey?”

The dog wagged his tail, stopped for a moment as if to consider the question, then darted across the road after a dead leaf which the November wind was turning over and over so fast that he could not be sure that it was not a very small and peculiarly shaped rabbit which was trying to escape him. The leaf, eluding both dog and wind, hastened to hide itself in the woods which stretched along the side of the road opposite the river, and at this the gale, baffled but undaunted, charged furiously and without warning upon the three-cornered hat on the boy's head. Before Pearson could put up his hand to catch it, the hat was gone,—whirled up the road at the rate of forty miles an hour. Both boy and dog gave chase, but the gale had the start, and it

was only the unexpected which always happens that saved the hat, and left the wind, for the second time, the loser in the race.

The unexpected was another boy. Stepping out of the woods into the road just in front of the hat as it was being driven past him on its hurried course, and being a boy of quick thought and prompt action, he captured the chase before the wind could collect itself to interfere. Colonel came bounding along with short, sharp barks of uncertainty and excitement, and a moment later Pearson ran up, bare-headed and out of breath.

For an instant the two boys stood silently regarding each other. Then the newcomer asked, holding out the rather battered-looking article of head-gear:

“Is this your hat?”

“Yes,” answered Pearson, “and I’m mighty glad you caught it for me. Thank you,” he added, as the other handed him the hat, and he put it firmly on his head. They began to walk along the road together, for it was too cold to stand still long.

“What’s your name?” asked Pearson, with a view to further acquaintance. “Do you live here?”

“Yes,” replied the other boy; “my name is Ben Hadley, and I live on the farm next to yours.”

“How do you know where I live?” asked Pearson, surprised. “I’ve only been here three days, and I never saw you before.”

“I’ve seen *you*,” returned Ben, smiling, “and your dog, too. I went by your place the day after you

came, and you were both in the south lot. Then I asked old Sam who the new family was, and he said your name was Holcomb, and you'd just come from Massachusetts. He says he's going to work for you."

"The coloured man, Sam? Yes, he is; my grandfather sent him to us."

"I know your grandfather and grandmother, — maybe better than you do, if you've always lived in Massachusetts. They're Mr. and Mrs. Van Brunt, over the river, aren't they?"

"Yes; that's one reason we came here, because they're getting so old, and mother didn't want to be so far away from them. Then, after Harry joined the army, it was lonesome in Marblehead, so father sold the house, and we came to New Jersey."

"Who's Harry? Which army's he in?"

"Which army! *Our* army, of course, — General Washington's. Harry's my brother. Which army do you suppose he'd be in?"

"I didn't know. He might be a redcoat, mightn't he?"

"He might *not*! Are you for the King?"

"No; I guess I'm not! But I didn't know but what you were; lots of folks are, around here. They say we've got no chance, and all they want is to make peace. You know we've been losing everywhere, lately."

"Yes; I know. I hate to talk about it, but it does look awful dark for us, just now."

“Was your brother with our men on Long Island?”

“Was he!” cried Pearson, brightening up; “I guess if he hadn’t been, or, at any rate, if his regiment hadn’t been, they’d never have got over to New York that night. Harry’s one of Colonel Glover’s marine regiment, and they’re all more at home on the water than they are on the land.

We’ve always lived by the sea. I’ve got a boat here on the river.”

Ben came closer to Pearson as he heard this last statement, and, looking around as if to see that no one was near, he said, in a low tone:

“You won’t have it very long.”

“What do you mean?” asked Pearson, surprised.

“Why won’t I have it? Who’ll take it?”

“My father, and Mr. Barnes, and some other good patriots,” replied Ben, mysteriously.

“What in creation do you mean?” demanded Pearson, for the second time. “What will they take my boat for?”

“Well, it’s a secret, but you’re on the right side, and I’ll tell you. General Washington has sent scouts up and down the river for seventy miles,



GETTING ACQUAINTED.

with orders to collect all the boats of every kind, and bring 'em to some place near here. They came to our farm only yesterday, and father's so well known as a patriot that they've given him charge of the whole thing. He'll have to take your boat, too, I suppose, though maybe not just yet."

"But what's it all for?"

Again Ben looked mysterious, and very important. He laid one hand on Pearson's arm, and, putting his lips close to the other's ear, he whispered:

"For Washington's army to cross in, if they have to!"

Pearson started. "Are they coming here?" he asked, excitedly. "How do you know?"

"The messenger told father. He left the army two days ago, near Hackensack. They're retreating across this State, and Cornwallis is after 'em. Perhaps they'll make a stand at Trenton, and perhaps they'll have to go on to Philadelphia. The boats are to take them across if it's necessary. Oh, I wish I was big enough to fight!"

"Shake hands!" responded Pearson to this, heartily. "I wish so, too; I've wished it a hundred times!"

He held out his hand as he spoke, and Ben clasped it warmly. The two boys were friends from that moment.

"Are you going into the town?" asked Ben, as they walked on again.

"Yes," answered Pearson. "It was dark the

other night when we got there in the stage, and grandfather met us with his horses, and took us right out to our farm, and I haven't been this way since. So this morning father said Colonel and I could go and see what Trenton looks like. Is that where you're going?"

"Yes; I'm on my way to my grandmother's; she's a Quakeress. You come there with me, and then I'll show you the rest of the town. It's pretty large; I guess there's a hundred houses, or maybe more, on both sides of the Creek."

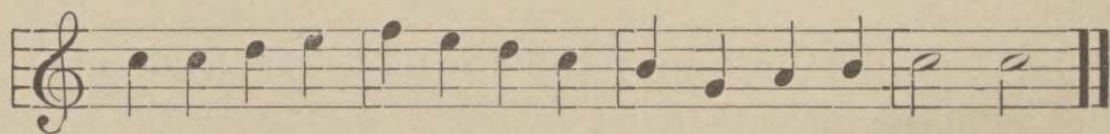
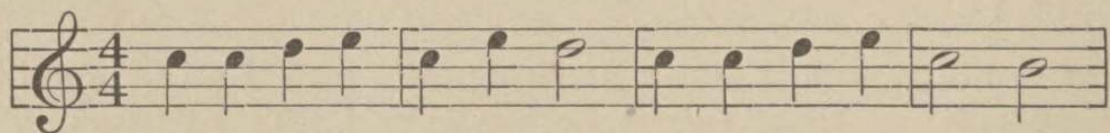
"Do you call that large? Marblehead is bigger than that, and then you ought to see Boston!"

"Have you been in Boston?"

"Well, I guess I have! I lived there till I was ten years old."

"You did! You must have seen a lot. I've never been in any town but Trenton."

"Why, I lived in Boston when the first redcoats landed. I was only six years old, but I remember it perfectly. Harry and I ran after the band when the troops marched up to the castle. Did you ever hear this tune?" Pearson began to whistle:



"No," replied Ben, admiringly. "What is it?"

“It’s some old English tune,—something about Cromwell’s soldiers. The band played it that day while the men were landing, and when they were marching up to the castle. But last year I heard some new words to it, like this :

“ ‘Father and I went down to camp
Along with Captain Goodwin,
Where we see the men and boys
As thick as hasty puddin’.

“ ‘There was Captain Washington
Upon a slapping stallion,
A-giving orders to the men,—
I guess there was a million.’ ”

“That’s fine!” cried Ben. “Sing it again, so’s I can catch it, won’t you?”

Pearson good-naturedly sang and whistled it over and over, and by the time the boys reached Trenton they were both sending the new tune out on to the November air with all the force of their lungs.

They entered the town from the southeast, passed through the less thickly settled portion, crossed the Assanpuik Creek, and made their way to the house of Ben’s grandmother. The old lady welcomed them cordially, but when Ben said, “Grandmother, this is a new friend of mine, who’s just come from Massachusetts; his brother is in our army,” the Quakeress shook her head.

“Ah, Benjamin,” she said, gravely, “thou thinks too much of armies. Thou knows thy grandfather

had naught to do with warlike things, and grieved at heart would he be if he could hear thy talk of fight."

"Why, grandmother," laughed Ben, "don't you think General Washington is a good man?"

"I doubt it not, my son; I doubt not that friend George is a good man according to his lights."

"And Doctor Franklin, that father named me for? *He* believes in fighting; he's on his way to France even now to get help for our armies if he can."

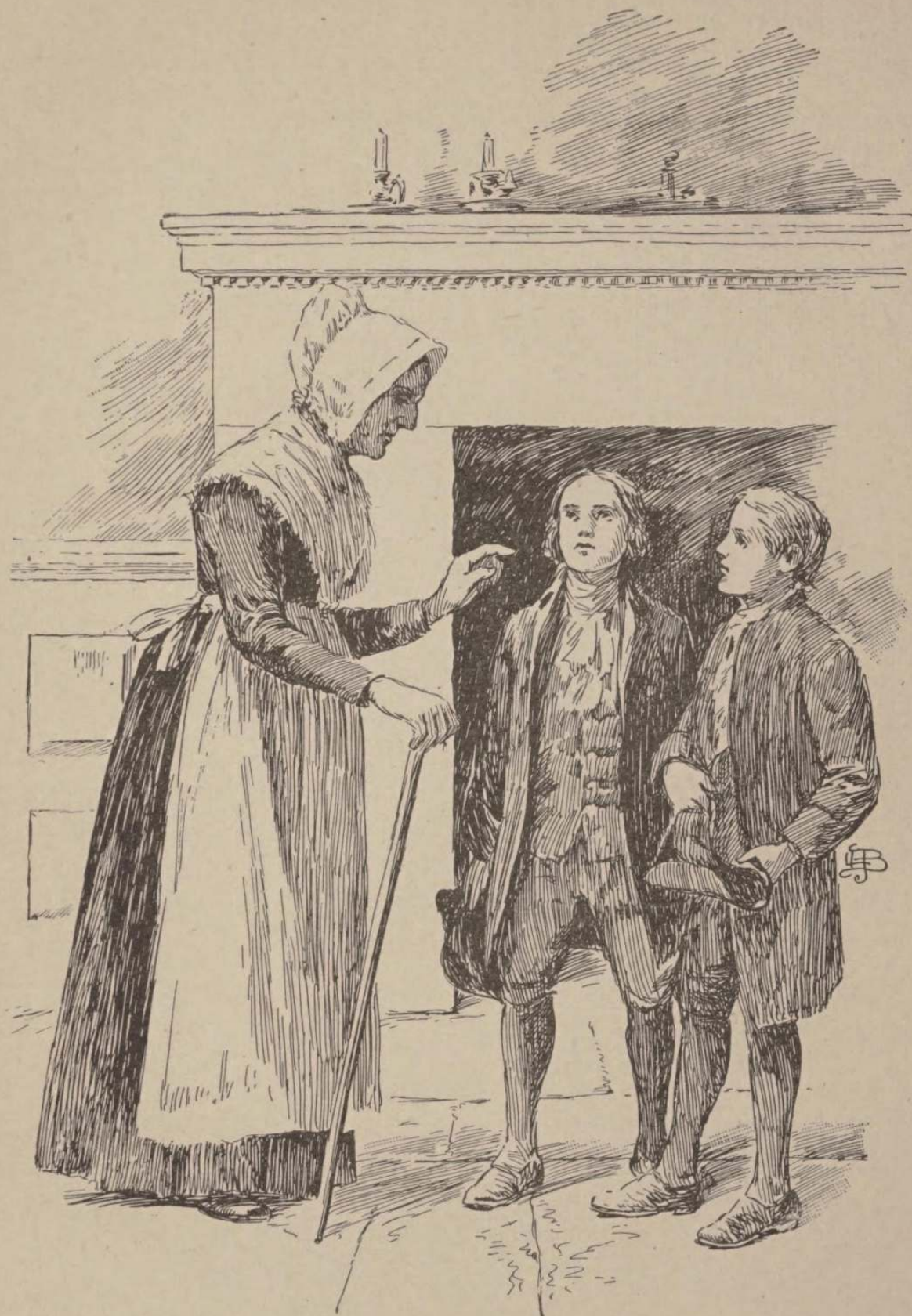
The old lady shook her head again. "Thy grandfather had naught to do with war or warlike things," she repeated. "But thou art young, Benjamin; thou art young; and these are troublous times."

"Now, Ben," said Pearson, after they had left the home of the Quakeress, and were making their way back through the town on to the river road again, "suppose you go with me to see my grandfather and grandmother. It's early yet, and we'll have time to go, and get back before dinner. You can row, can't you?"

"Of course I can."

"All right. There's two sets of oars in the boat, and we'll be there in less than an hour. Come on."

The two boys and the dog went back the way they had come, past the woods from which Ben had appeared to capture the hat, and which he told Pearson were on the edge of his father's farm, and down the road a quarter of a mile further until they came to a place where a good-sized row-boat floated in the



“‘ FRIEND GEORGE IS A GOOD MAN.’ ”

Delaware River. Colonel instantly leaped into the boat in a manner which showed that it was not the first time he had been on the water in a craft like that, and the boys took the oars and pushed off into the stream, heading the bow of the boat towards the north.

“Ben,” began Pearson, after they had rowed in silence for a short time, “if they should collect all the boats soon,—you know what you were telling me,—how could I get over to grandfather’s?”

“Well,” answered Ben, “there’s a ford about three miles from here; and then eight miles above Trenton is MacKonkey’s ferry; you could go over in that.”

“But that would be a tarnation long walk,” objected Pearson. “We’re a mile below Trenton, so it would be nine miles up to the ferry, and then about three miles back to grandfather’s. Whew!”

“Perhaps father won’t think it’s necessary to take your boat, if you object to giving it,” returned Ben, rather stiffly.

Pearson noticed the change of voice, and looked quickly around. He knew in a moment the reason for Ben’s altered manner.

“Why, look here, Ben,” he said, instantly, “I forgot for a minute what the boats are wanted for. Of course I’ll give mine up, and be glad to do it,—I guess I’d do more than that for the army, any day. They can have it any time they want it, and I’ll walk.”

“Oh, well,” answered Ben, in a mollified tone,

“it may not be necessary. Father knows that your family are on the right side, and your place and ours are so near the town that I should think our boats might be left where they are till they’re needed. We could bring ’em up in a hurry at any time if they wanted ’em. And besides that, there’ll soon be so much ice in the river that you couldn’t row a boat over, anyway; and by a month from now it will probably be frozen solid, so you can walk on the ice from shore to shore.”

The boys rowed on till they reached a point nearly five miles above Trenton, on the Pennsylvania side of the river. There they landed, tied the boat, and with Colonel bounding on ahead, they made their way up the bank, and were on Mr. Van Brunt’s farm. A short walk over the fields took them to the house, where they were made welcome by the old Dutch farmer and his wife, and urged to come over again.

“We may not have any boats very long, Mr. Van Brunt,” said Ben, and he went on to tell the old gentleman what he had whispered to Pearson earlier in the morning.

“Is it so? Is it so?” answered Mr. Van Brunt, thoughtfully. “Well, boy,” he continued, turning to his grandson, “your ancestors fought for freedom against the Spaniards in the old days, and you’ve some of their spirit in you yet, it may be.”

“Lots of it, grandfather!” cried Pearson, quickly; “and I only hope I’ll get a chance to show it!”

After this, the two boys and the dog were together part of every day. The weather grew rapidly colder. It was the last week in November, and the ground was frozen hard. Thin ice was beginning to form along the banks of the Delaware, but it was easily broken by Pearson's oars, as day after day he and Ben pushed the boat out into the stream, and rowed



GATHERING THE BOATS.

for several miles in one direction or the other. The boat had been left in Pearson's possession, but Ben confided to him that there was hardly another to be found on the Delaware, or any of the small tributary streams. One by one they had been quietly gathered together, and fastened to the river bank in front of the town of Trenton. No explanation of this course

was given, but it began to be generally understood that the boats would soon be needed. Some of the country people gave up their crafts willingly, but very many refused to relinquish them until obliged to do so by the committee in charge.

“They don’t know what they’re for,” Pearson suggested to Ben, when the latter indignantly told him of this reluctance of the people.

“Oh, yes, they do,” retorted Ben. “Nearly every one knows now that the boats are being collected for our soldiers, and that’s just the reason most of these folks around here don’t want to give ’em up. They’re a great deal more anxious to make peace with England than they are to help the American army. They don’t want the war to come into New Jersey, because it will ruin the farms, perhaps, and maybe destroy some of the towns. They care more for their own safety and comfort than they do for the freedom of their country. Why, there’s Mr. Tucker, — Samuel Tucker, — do you know what he’s done?”

“No; I don’t even know who he is.”

“Well, he’s one of New Jersey’s great men, or at least he was. He was the head of the convention that made our constitution, and the first man in the committee of safety, and the treasurer, and the judge of the Supreme Court; and yet he’s gone and accepted Howe’s offer, and signed some papers saying he’d be true to the British! And his doing it has made lots more do the same thing. Oh, I despise

him, and everybody like him!" burst forth Ben, impetuously. "And I'm so sorry for General Washington I don't know what to do. I should think he'd just get discouraged and give up!"

Every day after this some news was received from the army, which was rapidly approaching the river. Men came into Trenton from Hackensack, Newark, Brunswick, all bringing the same reports,—Washington's forces were retreating across New Jersey, and the redcoats, under Cornwallis, were always just behind them. Pearson and Ben felt that the war was coming very near, and they longed for and yet dreaded the immediate presence of the opposing forces. They eagerly questioned those who had seen either army in its rapid progress across the State; and the descriptions which they received of the small and daily diminishing American forces filled them with dire forebodings and dismay.

"Have you seen that man from Brunswick that came into the town this morning?" Ben asked Pearson. "He says our army is in an awful state. The men haven't got *anything*, hardly,—no tents, and hardly any clothes for this cold weather; and lots of them are barefooted, and they're tired out and discouraged. And he says that nearly all the ones whose enlistments have expired are going home, and lots of men are deserting every day. By the time they get here there'll hardly be any army left!"

"I know it. And the British troops have every-

thing they need, and they are laughing at the Continental soldiers, just as they used to do in Boston," returned Pearson, with grief and indignation.

"Yes, they say Cornwallis's army looks fine; and they're marching along after our men with their bands playing, and their flags flying, and feeling perfectly sure they're going to beat. I tell you, Pearson, I wouldn't say so to any one else, but sometimes I'm terribly afraid of the way things are going to turn out for our side."

The first day of December came, and they heard that the American army would probably reach Princeton that night.

"Then they'll be here to-morrow!" exclaimed both boys, in an excitement which was shared by every one for miles around.

Early on the morning of December 2d, scores of men and boys were out on the road between Trenton and Princeton, to catch the first glimpse of the approaching forces. Among the rest, Pearson and Ben waited anxiously.

"Harry will be with them," Pearson said, eagerly; "and we haven't seen him since last August."

"I do wish they'd come!" answered Ben, impatiently. "It's so cold, standing here."

It was cold, of course, and the time seemed long, for it was nearly noon before the waiting was ended. Then suddenly, and at last, the long-expected army came into sight. But what an army! Slowly, wearily, like men who had fought, and lost, and suffered;



THE ARRIVAL OF THE AMERICAN FORCES.

men who had been driven from place to place during days and weeks of defeat and failure; retiring always before a pursuing enemy, made insolent by repeated successes, the little force which was the sole hope of American liberties came into view. Only the commander-in-chief and his aids were mounted, and their very horses seemed impressed by the sense of inadequacy and hardship which prevailed.

The waiting crowd were almost awestruck by this revelation of a state of things, for which even the repeated rumours of disaster had not prepared them. There were a few feeble cheers as the troops approached, but they died away as the men marched by. Even the hostile and the indifferent — those who looked upon the war as rebellion, and those who cared chiefly that it should not bring personal loss and desolation to their homes — were moved to respectful silence by the condition of this handful of men who were slowly passing. Very few had clothing sufficient for that winter day; the shoes of most were torn and broken; in many cases the feet were altogether bare. Red tracks were left on the frozen ground, and many of the muskets were stained with blood from cold and bleeding hands. It was a pitiful sight, and it seemed, even to the most loyal among that silent crowd, to be a sight that marked a hopeless cause.

Scarcely a word was spoken by the onlookers, until the last of the little band had gone by. Then Pearson and Ben, with the others who had come out that morning from Trenton and the outlying farms,

turned back, and dispiritedly followed the army until the town was reached.

“Harry saw me,” was almost the only remark that Pearson made as they were on their homeward way. “He’ll come to the farm to see us, I suppose, as soon as he can get leave of absence.”

It was not until the next day that he came. All that afternoon the men were kept hard at work conveying the stores and baggage across the river to the Pennsylvania side, and Harry Holcomb, as one of the marine regiment, could not be spared for an instant from the management of the boats as they were rowed again and again across the Delaware in the effort to finish the transportation before the close of the short December day. Ben and Pearson, with numbers of others, were on the river bank until the last boat-load had been carried over, and the soldiers had returned to the New Jersey side of the river, where, worn-out, cold, and hungry, they began to make their simple preparations for the night.

The commander-in-chief had not rested during one hour of that busy afternoon. He had crossed the river with the first boats that had gone over, and had personally superintended the arrangements for the disposal of the baggage. Then he had returned to the New Jersey side, and as the hurried hours passed had seemed to be everywhere among the men, helping to bring order out of confusion, and by his own unwearyed and incessant activities keeping up the courage and resolution of his soldiers. It was his spirit that

pervaded men and officers alike, and at that time it might have been truly said of Washington that he alone was the American army.

“There’s nothing on earth I wouldn’t do for the chief,” declared Harry Holcomb the next day, to his father and mother and Pearson; “and every man in the army feels just as I do. We’d have gone to pieces long ago if it hadn’t been for him. A good many folks think we’re going to pieces soon anyway, and things do look pretty desperate, but *I* believe the general’s going to pull us through. No one who hasn’t seen it can have the slightest idea of what General Washington has been, and what he’s done, since the battle of Long Island. This retreat through the State has been awful. Over and over again we’ve been within cannon-shot of the redcoats. We had to pull down bridges behind us, and build ’em up in front of us; we haven’t had enough to eat, or enough to wear; and it’s been nothing but discouragement and failure all along. How we’ve come through it as well as we have, I don’t know. The chief did it, — that’s all I can say.”

For four days the Continental army remained at Trenton, waiting for reinforcements. Then news came from Princeton that Cornwallis was advancing upon the Americans, who were there under Stirling, and Washington set out to their assistance. On the way he met Stirling in full retreat towards Trenton, whereupon he faced about and returned with all the troops to that town.

On December 8th the American forces crossed the Delaware to the Pennsylvania side, and took up their quarters there, a short distance back from the river. It was on Sunday morning that the rear guard, under the commander-in-chief himself, effected the crossing, and they were hardly on the opposite bank before Cornwallis's army appeared in hot pursuit. But the boats were gone! In vain the British officers rode up and down the banks of the river, seeking means of conveyance to the other side. None were to be had. Even Pearson's boat had been impressed for the time into the service of the patriots, and with the others was closely guarded on the Pennsylvania shore.

It gave the two boys the keenest delight to witness the spectacle of that English army, decked out in all the panoply of war, far superior in numbers and equipment to the small and ill-conditioned force across the river, yet, baffled by the foresight and generalship of the American commander, utterly unable to reach the object of its chase.

"Just in time!" cried Ben, gleefully. "Our men got over just in time, didn't they? And not a boat left for old Cornwallis! He can't get across to save his life, unless he builds boats, or waits for the river to freeze over. I wonder which he'll do."

It appeared that the British general had no intention of adopting the former course, at any rate. No boat-building was attempted, and it seemed that, for the time at least, Cornwallis had abandoned the pur-

suit of the Americans. In a few days it became known that he had gone to New York, leaving Grant in command in New Jersey. The main force of the British was stationed at Brunswick, while along the east bank of the Delaware were cantoned the German troops.

At Trenton a brigade of three Hessian regiments was stationed, and the quiet little town became all at once a military post, full of life and bustle.

The day that this disposition of the troops was effected, Ben came to Pearson in great excitement.

"I've just come from the town," he began, talking quickly, "and it's full of those tarnation Germans, or Hessians, or whatever they call themselves; and where *do* you think their commander has taken up his headquarters?"

"I don't know. Where?" asked Pearson, full of interest.

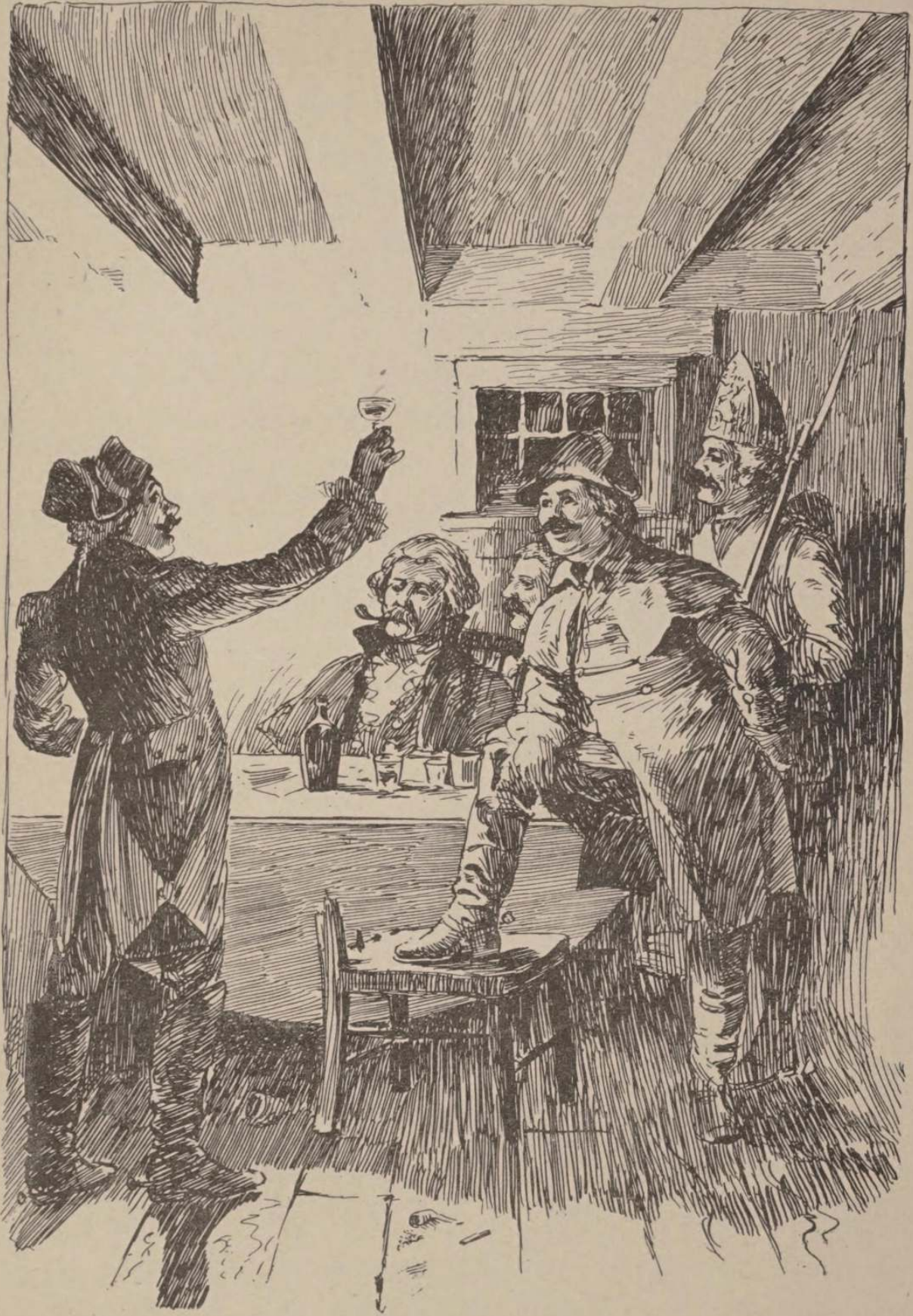
"*At my grandmother's*, of all places in the world! You know how she hates anything connected with war, and now there she is, in the very centre of a military post, with the commander in her own house! I'm really sorry for her. She'd give anything not to have him, but he took a notion to the place, and the location and all, and there he would go, and nowhere else. I was there when he came, this morning."

"Well, that *is* bad," said Pearson, sympathisingly. "What kind of a looking man is he, and what's his name?"

“His name is Rall, — Colonel Rall. Oh, he’s a good-looking man enough, but anybody can see he thinks he’s about the most important person there is in the English army. He strutted around there, giving his orders, and making a hundred times more fuss than General Washington did getting all our troops and baggage into camp on the other side of the river. He’s got two cannon put in front of the house, and I heard him give orders for a grand parade after dinner, with music, and all the show he can have. We’d better go and see the fun.”

The boys went into Trenton that afternoon, and nearly every day after that for a week or more. They saw Colonel Rall very frequently when they stopped for brief calls on Ben’s grandmother, but neither their liking nor their respect for the Hessian officer increased with further acquaintance. The old Quaker lady was scandalised by the behaviour of her unwelcome guest.

“He is never in bed at night before twelve or one o’clock,” she complained to the boys; “and dear knows what goes on down-stairs after I have gone up to my room. I hear sounds of glasses, and loud songs, and I know there is card-playing; often the officers quarrel over it so that I tremble when I hear them. And in the morning, the colonel lies in bed till nine or ten o’clock, — Thursday morning he was in his bath when the guard came to present themselves at headquarters, and they had to wait over half an hour for the colonel to appear.”



THE NOISY HESSIANS.

The boys heard similar stories from other citizens of Trenton, on whom the troops were quartered. The Hessian regiments were anything but popular in the town, or in the neighbouring country. And very soon there began to be tales of depredations and outrages committed upon the New Jersey people, which showed a far worse condition of affairs than would have been brought about by only the vanity and folly of the commanding officer. Every day there were fresh stories of the seizure of property from both Whigs and Tories. Nothing was safe,—everything which the foreigners fancied was taken as a right; and it became a daily occurrence for the boys to meet long trains of captured horses and cattle, and wagon-loads of provisions and other property being driven and carried by the mercenaries to the Hessian posts. When complaints were made to the officers commanding in New Jersey, no satisfaction was obtained; the answer was coolly given that the Hessians had come to America with the expectation of getting plunder, and that to allow them to obtain it was the only way to prevent desertions.

—On the opposite side of the river, a very different state of affairs prevailed. There all was quiet. The homes of the country people had security and peace, for nothing was taken from the farmers but what was absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the army. There were no parades in the American camp, no martial music, and, indeed, very little of

even the ordinary formalities which pertain to the headquarters of a national army. Neither officers nor men had much heart for unnecessary display just at that time, and the commander-in-chief, in particular, had graver matters for hand and mind than any military demonstrations for demonstrations' sake.

As soon as it was known that Cornwallis had left the State, and things became, for the time at least, comparatively quiet along the Delaware, those persons who were known to be loyal to the American cause had been allowed to repossess themselves of boats for their own use. Pearson was among those who thus obtained their rowboats again, and after that he and Ben crossed the river every day to spend some time with Harry Holcomb and others in the patriot camp. The two boys were soon well known among the Continental soldiers, and were great favourites with all the men. Colonel always accompanied his master on these trips, and it was curious to see the distinction which the dog made between the American and the British soldiers. With the former he was in high favour, and he seemed to appreciate, and as far as he could to reciprocate, the attentions which were shown him in Washington's camp. But among the men on the other side of the river he behaved himself like a different dog. Pearson shrewdly suspected that some of the Hessians must have ill-treated Colonel on some of their marauding expeditions, for the very

sight of a redcoat was enough to make the dog begin to growl, and he acted as if nothing would please him better than to challenge one of those foreigners to settle the whole matter of the Revolution by single combat.

After their daily visits to the American camp, the boys usually rowed the four or five miles further up the river to the home of Pearson's grandparents; but as the season advanced, and the weather grew colder, the floating ice in the water began to render it more and more difficult to do this. Two or three days before Christmas there was so much ice in the stream that, as the boys were rowing down towards Trenton after one of their visits to the Van Brunt farm, their boat narrowly escaped being crushed between two of the floating, frozen masses.

"We sha'n't be able to do this much longer, Ben," remarked Pearson, regretfully. "In fact, I shouldn't wonder if this will be our last row for the season."

"Well, if it is," answered Ben, "we'll soon be able to go across on the ice. You can skate, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, I can skate," returned Pearson; "but I'll be sorry to have the river freeze up, just the same. I say, Ben, when it does get solid from shore to shore, what's to prevent those Hessian ruffians from crossing over to our camp if they want to?"

"Nothing's to prevent 'em," Ben answered, with sudden gravity.

"What if Cornwallis should come back and take his whole army across the river?" continued Pearson,

suggestively. "You know as well as I do that our side hasn't men enough to resist an attack, any more than it had a month ago."

"I know it," replied Ben, gloomily. "I've been feeling sort of happy for the last week or so, thinking how finely the chief got our men over there just in time, and took all the boats so old Cornwallis couldn't follow; but now it's plain enough that boats won't be needed long, and I don't see but what things are going to be as bad as ever again."

The river was not frozen over quite as soon as the boys expected. They were able to go out again next day, and the next, until it became the twenty-fourth of December, — the day before Christmas. Then Mr. and Mrs. Holcomb and Pearson were invited by the old people to cross the river on the following day, and take their Christmas dinner at the Dutch homestead; and as Pearson and Ben had become by this time almost inseparable companions, Mrs. Van Brunt kindly suggested that her grandson might bring his friend with him, — a suggestion which Ben most joyfully accepted. The party were to row up the river to the farm, if possible; but if there should be too much ice in the stream on Christmas morning, they had decided to drive north eight or nine miles, and cross at MacKonkey's ferry.

The day came, and with it a disappointment. Mrs. Holcomb had been taken ill in the night, and would not be able to go out. Her husband would not go without her, but they both decided that there was no

reason why the boys could not have their anticipated pleasure.

“Your mother isn’t sick enough to keep you home, Pearson,” Mr. Holcomb said; “so you and Ben go over and tell the old folks why we couldn’t all come. Stay to dinner, of course, but be sure to start back early in the afternoon. You won’t want to take Colonel, will you?”

“Oh, yes, I will,” replied Pearson; “he’ll make the boat steadier.”

“Make the boat heavier, you mean,” said Mr. Holcomb, laughing; “but I suppose you’d want to take him if he weighed a ton. Well, be sure to come home before dark.”

This the boys agreed to do. First they went down to the river bank, and debated the question of going in the rowboat. Boy-like, the amount of ice that was floating in the stream, and the consequent difficulty that there would be in effecting the passage, only stimulated their desire to try that method of getting to their Christmas dinner. They both decided that it would be possible (and if a little dangerous, so much the better) to row up to the Van Brunt farm, as long as they could see where they were going, and avoid the floating masses of ice; but even their temerity did not extend so far but that they felt that it would be a very hazardous thing to attempt to go on the river after dark, and they resolved to leave the homestead early in the afternoon.

So they started, boys and dog, and, by clever man-

agement and not a little hard labour on the part of the former, they succeeded in reaching their destination soon after ten o'clock in the morning, having left their homes two hours before.

A Christmas welcome greeted them. They explained the non-arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Holcomb, and then spent the hour or two before dinner in skating on a pond in one of the fields. By noon it seemed to the boys that they had had nothing to eat for at least a week, and they brought to the holiday dinner such appetites that Mr. Van Brunt said gravely that it was fortunate that the other guests had been unable to come, or the supply, bountiful as it appeared, might have failed to meet the demand.

"What did Harry say was the reason he couldn't come?" asked Pearson, between two mouthfuls of pie.

"He did not give any reason," answered the grandmother. "He said he was sorry, but he could not get leave of absence for to-day, and he did not seem to want me to ask any questions."

"That's queer," commented Ben; "there can't be anything for him to do in camp now, can there?"

At this moment, Pearson chanced to look out of the window.

"Hello!" he exclaimed; "see how it's snowing."

Every one turned to look, and sure enough, while they had been finishing their Christmas dinner, the world outside had begun to be filled with the flying flakes of a hard snowstorm. The wind was rising,

too, and before three o'clock in the afternoon it was blowing a gale from the northeast.

"You boys must not try to get home to-night," said Mr. Van Brunt, hospitably. "They will not expect you in this storm, and we shall be glad to have you here."

"Oh, thank you, sir," answered Pearson; "but I must go. Mother is sick, you know, and I couldn't possibly stay away all night."

"Neither could I," said Ben; "I said I would be home before dark, and of course I wouldn't let Pearson go alone, anyway. I don't believe we'll have any trouble if we start right away."



GRANDMA VAN BRUNT.

"Well, if you must go," said Mr. Van Brunt, regretfully, "we won't ask you to wait another moment. If you were not as strong and hardy as you are, I should be afraid to have you try it; but you are used to being out in stormy weather, and you both know how to manage a boat, so I hope you will get home without any accident."

The boys had been putting on their caps and mufflers even while they were talking, and now, with hasty good-byes, and assurances that they would be all right, they went bravely out into the storm.

“Whew!” whistled Ben, as they ran across the fields down to the river, “how the wind does howl! It’s lucky for us it’s blowing towards home, Pearson.”

They reached the west bank of the Delaware, but then stopped, and looked down with dismay at what was before them. The snow was falling fast, yet through the whirl of flakes the water was plainly visible. It looked dark and cold and angry, and it was full of huge blocks of ice which were being every instant ground together by the short, choppy waves that rose and fell continually. Pushed and buffeted by the wind, the cakes were never still for a second, and a yard or two of black water that was clear and free at one moment would the next be covered with tossing masses of ice and snow.

The boys’ hearts almost failed them. Accustomed as both were to braving all kinds of storms, the conviction came to each one now that to row a boat for five miles, down such a river as that, would be almost an impossibility. Yet neither boy said so, — each waited for the other to propose to give up the attempt to get home that night. They stood there a minute longer in silence, while the wind whistled past them, and they could hear the thump and crash of the jostling blocks of ice below. Then Pearson spoke.

“Where is the boat?” he asked, quietly.

Ben caught his breath quickly, but only answered:

“It must be just below here, — that’s where we left it.” Without another word they made their way to the place where they had drawn the boat up on the river bank that morning.

But it was not there! Hurriedly they ran up and down the shore, thinking they might have mistaken the spot in the storm; but no boat was to be seen. Colonel, whose St. Bernard blood no storm could daunt, went racing back and forth, bounding on before the boys with his joyous bark, as if he thought the whole adventure had been planned with direct reference to his pleasure and excitement.

“Where can it have gone?” panted Ben, after nearly fifteen minutes of fruitless search. “It couldn’t have been blown away, could it?”

“No, of course it couldn’t,” retorted Pearson. “We drew it way up on to the bank, and it couldn’t have got away, unless some one has taken it.”

“Who would take it in this storm?” asked Ben, incredulously.

“Then where is it?”

“I don’t know; it isn’t here, anyway.”

They searched for a short time longer, and then Ben asked:

“What can we do?”

“I know what *I’m* going to do,” returned Pearson, firmly; “I’m going to the ferry.”

“Walk?” cried Ben.

“Yes.”

“And walk home nine miles on the other side of the river?”

“Yes. I’ve often walked further than that.”

“So have I, but not in such a storm as this.”

“I don’t believe it will be as bad as it would have

been rowing down the river. Anyway, I'm going to do it."

"Then so am I. I can do it if you can."

"Come on, then. Come, Colonel!" was Pearson's only reply; and tying their scarfs more tightly over their ears and around their throats, the boys started.

They had gone on bravely and steadily for over a mile, when suddenly Colonel stopped, put his nose to the ground, sniffed a little, and began to whine.

"What is it, Colonel?" exclaimed Pearson, running up to the dog. He stooped over and examined the snow at his feet for a moment, and then cried, quickly, "Ben, look here! This is blood!"

"Blood!" repeated Ben, in amazement; "so it is," as he also bent over the pink spot on the ground.

"And look here, — here's some more," cried Pearson, going on a few steps further. "And here's another place!" he continued, rapidly.

"It's the tracks of some one who has gone along here without any shoes," said Ben, excitedly.

"I should say it's the tracks of a good many people without shoes," returned Pearson. "There are too many of them, and they're not in the right places for only one person's marks."

"Who do you suppose has left them?"

Pearson did not answer for a moment; then he asked, slowly:

"Ben, what men go without shoes in this weather?"

Ben started. "*The army!*" he exclaimed. "Do you think it's our army, Pearson?"



“‘BEN, LOOK HERE, THIS IS BLOOD!’”

“Yes, I do,” answered Pearson; “it must be.”

“But when did they pass us? It can’t be very long since they went by here, or these tracks would have been covered up by the snow.”

“They must have gone down the road while we were at dinner; or else they went by while we were looking for the boat, and we didn’t hear them on account of the wind.”

“Maybe it was some of the army men that took our boat this morning,” suggested Ben. “Perhaps they need all the boats they can get, for something they’re going to do. What do you suppose it is?”

“I don’t know; but probably that’s why Harry couldn’t go to grandpa’s to dinner. Say, Ben, they’ll be at the ferry! If they’re going to cross the river for anything, that’s the best place. Come on, quick!”

They started again, running as long as they could through the snow, which was getting deeper and deeper, and, when they were out of breath, settling down to a hurried walk. Their search for the boat had delayed their start from the Van Brunt farm, and the difficulty of making their way through the storm so hindered their progress that it was almost sunset when at last they came in sight of MacKonkey’s ferry.

A quarter of a mile before they reached the place, Colonel began to show signs of excitement, and to run eagerly on ahead of the boys. They quickened their pace again, and in five minutes more they saw, as Pearson had predicted, — the army.

There they were, in the winter twilight, two thou-

sand four hundred men, scantily clad, and in as forlorn a condition as when they had marched across New Jersey a month before. They had come six miles through the storm, from the American camp, that afternoon, and were already cold and tired; yet even the boys could see, as they came upon the little band of patriots, that something was before them to be done that night, in comparison with which the soldiers would regard their previous fatigue and suffering as matters of no consequence whatever. There was an air of resolute determination about every man; but as Pearson and Ben stood for a moment regarding them silently, the whole force and purpose of the army seemed to be centred and concentrated in one individual, — the commander-in-chief. Years afterward the boys agreed that never, for any other man, at any other time, had they felt such a thrill of admiration and devoted affection as at that moment they felt for Washington. Scarcely better clothed than his humblest private, surrounded by no pomp of military circumstance, in the midst of every condition of privation and discouragement, yet there he stood that Christmas night, at the head of his little army, calm, resolute, and undismayed, — the hero of a nation.

After the first moment of startled silence the boys began eagerly to ask questions of their friends in the ranks. Why were they here? Where were they going? What were they going to do? The answers they received made them almost breathless with astonishment.

“To Trenton! To-night!” they repeated, incredulously. “In this storm?”

“We mean to take Trenton to-night,” one of the men replied, resolutely; “and we’d do it if it stormed a thousand times worse than it does.”

“Pearson,” said Harry Holcomb, taking his brother aside, “what are you and Ben doing here? Weren’t you at grandfather’s to dinner?”

Pearson hastily recounted the loss of the boat, their determination to go home that night, if possible, and the resolve to cross the river at the ferry, and walk down on the other side.

“Some of the men were out this morning, collecting any stray boats they might find, and all we have are just below here in the river,” explained Harry. “That’s where your boat is, I suppose. But now you’re here, Pearson, what do you expect to do? The army has taken possession of the ferry, of course, and no one can cross, — not a human being, for any purpose whatever. You’d better go back to grandfather’s, and stay there till to-morrow. The folks won’t expect you home to-night.”



ON TO TRENTON.

“Ben,” called out Pearson, “come here. Harry says,” he continued, as Ben came up, “that we’d better go back to the farm and stay all night. We can’t go over the ferry, — no one can.”

“How is the army going over?” demanded Ben.

“In the boats. They’re just below here, and Harry thinks ours is there, too.”

“Can’t we cross in it, then?”

“No, you can’t,” returned Harry, shortly. “Every boat will be needed for the men and the field-pieces. There is no need of your crossing at all. They won’t expect you at home in this storm, and you can just as well go back to grandfather’s as not.”

The boys exchanged glances.

“But, Harry,” Pearson began, impetuously, “you don’t understand. We don’t *want* to go back. We want to go across with you.”

“You want to cross with the army?” exclaimed Harry.

“Yes, we do.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. You might have to wait here half the night before there’d be a chance for you to go over, and the crossing’s going to be a terribly hard and dangerous thing, as you can see for yourself. Then you’d have to go with us to Trenton, and you might get killed.”

“*You’re* going to do it,” urged Ben.

“Of course I am. It’s my duty to do it.”

“But you know you’d go, whether it was your duty or not. You wouldn’t stay back to-night for anything

in the world, and we feel just the same way. Oh, Harry, don't say we can't go!"

The young soldier hardly knew what to answer. He sympathised perfectly with the boys' eager desire to share the adventures and even the hardships of the expedition, and in his heart he was proud of their pluck and patriotic spirit. He hesitated, but at last he said, though half reluctantly:

"Well, if you want to go so much, I suppose you'll have to do it. But don't blame me if you're sorry for it before you get through."

"We won't, we won't!" agreed the boys, joyfully; "but we're not going to be sorry."

Even while they had been talking, the preparations for the first crossing had been going on, and Harry was called to join his regiment in manning the boats. Silently the embarkation began. It was already dark, and the cold was becoming more and more severe. The current in the river was very strong, and even as the boats put out from shore they were blown out of their course, down the stream, while every instant the floating masses of ice threatened to crush them. With all the skill and experience of the fishermen from Marblehead, every crossing that was effected that night was made in the midst of almost overwhelming difficulty and danger. Yet not an accident occurred, — not a boat was lost.

Hour after hour the perilous work was carried on, while the boys stood on the river bank, with Colonel at their side, and waited for their turn to come.

Wet, tired out, and half frozen as they were, they thought occasionally of the warm beds that might have been theirs at the Van Brunt farm; yet not for a moment did they wish themselves anywhere but where they were.

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning before Harry came to them, and told them that the last men were going over now, and that they — the boys — could come with him in the boat which he was helping to manage. Gladly they followed him, and climbing with difficulty into the heaving, wet, and ice-coated rowboat, they huddled together in the bow, with Colonel at their feet.

They never forgot that crossing. The night was so dark that they could not see the water for more than three feet ahead of them. On all sides they could hear the ice, heaving and tossing, and crashing one block against another; and brave boys as they were, their hearts were in their throats over and over again as the floating blocks ground against the sides of their boat, and it seemed that they must be capsized and swept into the freezing water. The snow had turned to sleet and hail, and the boys bent over and covered their faces with their arms to save themselves from the sharp, stinging particles that the wind was driving against them. It was an experience of a lifetime.

At last they reached the New Jersey shore, and as they landed, and made their way up the bank, the boys again caught a glimpse of Washington. He had

crossed with the first boat-loads, early in the evening, and had been waiting ever since, feeling the precious time go by, his heart full of anxiety as to what was to be the result of this enterprise, on which, in all probability, the fate of his country depended, and yet outwardly calm and confident, cheering the men, and giving them resolution by his own undaunted courage.

It was three o'clock before the transportation of men and artillery was finally effected, and yet another hour was gone before the troops were formed in order for the march. Then eight miles of icy road lay between them and Trenton, to be traversed by men already nearly exhausted by the labours and hardships of the night. Bravely they started forward, and for mile after mile they struggled along, with bleeding feet, and bodies terribly exposed to the awful weather. And with the others went Pearson and Ben, often almost overcome by the storm and fatigue, yet always glad that they were there. It had been an awful night, but they were not sorry to have lived it.

At daylight the soldiers halted. At Birmingham the army had been separated into two divisions, and, as Sullivan's troops waited now for Washington's men to reach the cross-road, the former general sent word to the commander-in-chief that the storm had wet the muskets of his soldiers, and rendered them useless. Pearson and Ben were with Washington's division, and they heard the chief's answer to this report, and his quick, imperative order to the aid who had brought the message.

“Tell your general,” said Washington, sternly, “to use the bayonet, and penetrate into the town; for the town must be taken, and I am resolved to take it!”

By eight o'clock the Continental army was in the vicinity of Trenton, and the advance-guard was ordered to charge on the German picket. As the patriots came up, they were discovered by one of the Hessians at the outpost, and the man cried out in alarm:

“Der feind! der feind! heraus! heraus!” (The enemy! the enemy! turn out! turn out!)

Taken by surprise, the patrol fell back in confusion into the town. Washington advanced with the artillery, and entered Trenton by King and Queen Streets. In a few moments alarms were sounding everywhere, and the whole place was in an uproar. Some of the enemy fired wildly from behind houses, while others rushed forth and attempted to form in order of battle. Presently Colonel Rall appeared, on horseback, but without the presence of mind to do anything to lessen the general confusion. He tried to rally his men, crying bewilderedly, “Forward, march; advance, advance!” but at the same time reeling in his saddle like a drunken man. Before his regiment could form, its cannon were rapidly dismounted by the Americans, and Rall began to fall back. Then, rashly changing his mind, he cried, suddenly, “All who are my grenadiers, forward!” and himself led a wild charge upon the patriots.

All at once, as he was dashing on, the Hessian



“TELL YOUR GENERAL TO USE THE BAYONET.”

colonel was seen to lurch forward. He threw up his arms with a groan, and then fell heavily from his horse, fatally wounded. His men, dismayed by the fall of their chief, began a hasty retreat towards Assanpuik Creek, but were cut off by a force quickly despatched by Washington for that purpose. After vainly trying to cross the stream, the enemy grounded their arms, and surrendered.

During the whole of the action, which had lasted about thirty-five minutes, Pearson and Ben had not known whether their friends or their enemies were winning the day. It was, of course, the first battle the boys had ever seen, and both forces appeared to them to be mixed up in inextricable confusion. They were too excited to be afraid, although they were really in some danger, for the troops on both sides jostled against them, pushing them to one side and another, as the fighting became more furious in the main street of the town.

Indeed, Pearson very nearly lost his life on that memorable morning, and he was saved only by Colonel's devotion to his master, and his animosity towards the enemy. The dog had fairly bristled with excitement and rage from the first moment of the skirmish; for to see the hated redcoats in conflict with the army of his friends was more than his loyal dog's heart could possibly endure with calmness. He dashed wildly to and fro, barking furiously, making sudden charges upon detested Hessian calves, and doing not a little to annoy and harass the enemy. In

the midst of one of these onslaughts, Colonel suddenly saw his young master receive a blow from a Hessian musket that brought Pearson to the ground. It is not probable that the foreigner intended to hurt the unarmed boy, but the boy was in the way, and the blow was given without a thought. In another moment Pearson would have been trampled upon, and killed in the wild rush of the enemy's charge, but with one bound Colonel was by his master's prostrate form. For an instant only could the dog check the onward force of the Hessians, but that instant was enough to enable Pearson, who had not been seriously hurt by the musket blow, to scramble to his feet, and push his way out of the centre of the turmoil. Colonel followed him until he was safe at one side of the conflict, and then the dog returned to take his part in the fray, as before.

Pearson found Ben, from whom he had been separated, and together the boys watched the short skirmish with beating hearts. They witnessed Colonel Rall's vain endeavour to form his men for action, his hasty charge at the head of his regiment, and then his sudden hurt and fall. There were a few more moments of confused running and shouting; then suddenly the fighting seemed to cease, and, with one impulse, the boys began to make their way towards the spot where Washington was standing. They reached the commander as he was in the act of receiving the sword which Colonel Rall, pale and fainting, and supported by a file of sergeants, was

delivering up to his victorious foe. At that moment an American officer rode up for orders, and Washington, turning, took him by the hand, and said with deep feeling:

“Major Wilkinson, this is a glorious day for our country!”

But there was not much time for exultation. The patriots could not stay in Trenton, almost surrounded by the enemy's forces, but, exhausted as they were, they must push back across the Delaware that very day, taking the prisoners and captured artillery with them.

In the midst of the hurry and confusion of the preparations to return to the Pennsylvania side of the river, the great-hearted American commander found time to visit his conquered foe. Colonel Rall had been carefully moved to his headquarters at the home of his Quaker hostess, and from there word was brought to Washington that the Hessian commander was dying.

“Pearson and I were there at grandma's when the chief came in to see Colonel Rall,” Ben recounted that afternoon to eager listeners. “You'd never have thought that General Washington had just beaten a fight, and conquered Rall. He didn't seem a bit triumphant; he just acted sorry and sympathising, as if he and that Hessian had always been good friends. He took hold of Rall's hand, and asked him if there was anything he could do for him. The colonel was so weak he could hardly talk, but

I think he did appreciate the chief's kindness. He said, so low we could hardly hear him, and as if he couldn't get his breath, 'No, thank you, — general. I must surrender — to you — and death.' I couldn't help feeling sorry for him, and the chief didn't say another word, but just went away, looking a great deal more sober than he did when we saw him last night in the storm, by the river."

After this, both boys went out to see the American army start on its march back to the ferry.

"Look at the prisoners, Ben," said Pearson, as, closely guarded, the Hessians began to pass them. "How many do you suppose there are?"

"I know," answered Ben; "one of our men told me. There's just about a thousand of them."

"Whew!" exclaimed Pearson, "as many as that? What's going to be done with 'em?"

"I don't know," answered Ben, looking after the retreating forms, and speaking thoughtfully; "but I should think they'd make a good Christmas present for the country."

THE END.



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