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John T. McIntyre

THE MAN TOOK A STEP FORWARD

The Young Continentals at Bunker Hill

by

John T. McIntyre

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“The Young Continentals at Lexington”
“The Young Continentals at Trenton”

Illustrated by Ralph L. Boyer.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Young Continentals at Bunker Hill” tells of four boys who were with the American Army in the siege of Boston. It shows how Gage and the British Army were hemmed in by the colonial troops, tells of the stirring events in and about the beleaguered city, and finally of the heroic stand upon Breed’s Hill by Putnam, Prescott and the little patriot army. There is something also of the fights upon islands in the bay, of the coming of Washington to assume command, and the hoisting of the first American Union flag.

The same boys figured in an earlier volume, “The Young Continentals at Lexington.” Their adventures are equally stirring here, and the blows struck for liberty equally shrewd. This time Ezra Prentiss of the four boys has the leading rôle; once suspected of being an enemy to the colonies, he now proves that none can be more faithful than he.

Ezra and his friends appear again in a volume called “The Young Continentals at Trenton.” It tells something of the struggles about New York, and finally of the brilliant successes at Trenton and Princeton, in all of which the boys play their little parts bravely and well.

CHAPTER I—HOW EZRA PRENTISS HEARD OF A STRANGER

The tall bay horse and the little roan mare went at a hard gallop down the long, gentle descent of a hill. Both were flecked with foam, for the going was hard, despite the brisk April weather.

“How is the mare taking it?” asked Ezra Prentiss, after a time, drawing in the bay and patting his arched neck encouragingly.

The roan snorted and shook her head as though trying to answer for herself.

“It’s rather hard on her, I’m afraid,” returned Ben Cooper. “But she’s good for a great deal more of it.”

Part way down the slope both boys checked their mounts completely as though by mutual consent. Ezra sat silently in his saddle and swept the countryside with his steady gaze.

It was mid-afternoon and the sun was dropping fast toward the horizon in the west. Acres and acres of brown furrowed fields lay before them upon every side; afar off, men and horses were toiling with the plows; little clumps of houses were to be seen here and there, and tall columns of smoke ascended from the wide-mouthed chimneys into the clear air.

“We are going to have plenty to do from here to Chelmsford,” spoke Ezra at length. “The houses thicken considerably and there seem to be a great many men at work in the fields.” He paused once more, and then turning to Ben, added, “Do you think we can speak to all of them before night sets in?”

“If you took one road and I another, we might,” said Ben.

Ezra frowned. It was very evident that he did not particularly favor this.

“Since starting out from Cambridge we have separated twice,” said he. “And each time it had an almost serious result.”

“First a parcel of Tories were for putting an end to me for what they called treason to King and Parliament,” spoke Ben, good-humoredly.

“And that rascally tinker near Acton almost decoyed me into another nest of them,” added Ezra. “In these unsettled times the road is safer for two than one, especially after dark.”

Ben nodded.

“Right,” said he.

“However,” proceeded Ezra, “more or less danger was expected when we started out.” He touched the handle of a heavy holster pistol, and something of Ben’s good humor came into his face. “Another thing, the Tories are running as much risk as we are.”

“Right again,” declared the other boy. “That, I think, is the proper way to look at it.”

“And then,” continued Ezra, shifting his hand to a saddle pocket, almost filled to bursting with what looked like printed sheets, “we have these to deliver and no great time to do it in.”

There was a silence between them; they studied the country from the hillside and seemed to be revolving the matter earnestly. The brown fields were cut by the fairly smooth road which they were on, and a narrow, rutted wagonway.

“I’ll take this,” said Ezra, pointing toward the latter; “there seem to be quite a number of farmhouses over there beyond that rise, if we can judge by the smoke. You hold to the highroad and don’t miss a single man or boy.”

“Trust me for that,” said Ben. “But,” complainingly, “you always pick the hardest things to do for yourself. Molly is just as fresh as that beast of yours. And then she’s lighter and can pick her way along that broken road like a cat.”

Ezra laughed; and there was a look of appreciation in his eyes as he slapped his friend upon the back.

“Ben,” exclaimed he, “you’re the greatest fellow I ever knew! You always think your share of the work the easiest, no matter what it is. If General Ward had an army of fellows like you before Boston, Gage would not be able to hold the town for a week.”

Far away, against the horizon line, a spire arose from amidst a clump of dwellings.

“I will meet you there as soon after dark as I can,” continued Ezra, his outstretched finger indicating the tower. “If there is an inn wait for me there.”

After a few words more, Ezra urged the reluctant bay into the much cut wagon road; Ben, upon the soft-stepping roan, went loping easily down the highroad, his usually laughing face grave as became a rider with an urgent mission to perform.

Ezra Prentiss after a time dismounted and led his steed by the bridle.

“Mr. Paul Revere used to say a horse well looked after always finished earlier in the day,” said he to himself with a smile. “And I guess it’s true. At any rate, old fellow,” to the bay, “the going is too hard for a rider here; so I’ll try walking for a little, anyway.”

In a field he saw two men working with teams of oxen. He waited at a fence corner until one of them had completed his furrow.

“Good-day, neighbor,” called the boy.

“Good-day,” returned the farmer.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead and approached Ezra, glad of an excuse for a moment’s rest from his toil.

“Riding from Boston way?” he inquired eagerly.

“I left Cambridge a few days ago,” replied Ezra.

As he spoke the lad drew out one of the sheets from his saddle pocket and unfolded it. It was covered with an announcement in heavy, bold-faced type.

“This,” said the boy, “is issued by the Massachusetts Committee of Safety, and riders have been sent out in every direction to deliver them to the towns and people round-about.”

The farmer took the circular and began an earnest study of its appeal. The other man, seeing that something unusual was going forward, halted his team and also approached. Leaning over the shoulder of the first, he, too, read the earnest lines.

“You have heard long since what has been done,” said Ezra, soberly, when the two had finished and stood silently gazing at him. “We have struck the first real blow against the oppressors of the colonies. But what was done at Lexington and Concord is only a beginning.”

“A beginning!” said the first man, in surprise.

“Do you really mean to say that Dr. Warren and those others actually intend to go further in the matter?” exclaimed the second.

“They must,” said Ezra. The two before him had weak, wavering faces and thin, light-colored hair; from the close resemblance they bore each other, he judged they must be brothers. “To get any result from the first blow, a second must be struck,” he went on. “There would have been no use in making a beginning if an ending were not also made.”

“England is a powerful nation,” said the first man. “Eh, Josiah?”

“Mighty powerful,” agreed the other, “and so is the King and Parliament.”

“If the people of the colonies remain united and if every man does his full duty, the power of England, her King and Parliament, will be as that,” and the boy snapped his fingers. “This circular calls for the towns to encourage the enlistment of men in the colonial army, as you have seen. It tells you that every moment is precious. A day’s delay may mean the loss of all; it may bring slavery upon you.” He was quoting the document.

But the two men shook their heads. Indecision and fear of the situation were plain in their faces.

“We’ve just lately taken this farm,” said the one called Josiah, “and we’ve counted on this season’s yield to help pay for it. We can’t go into the army.”

“If every one thought of his personal affairs,” said Ezra, “our tyrants would crush us into the earth.” The boy had absorbed the resonant talk of the times, and its use had become a habit upon the present mission. “Take, for instance, men like Mr. Hancock, Mr. Adams, Dr. Warren, and a score of others. They risk very large fortunes in the cause; they give every moment of their time to it. They have done so from the first.”

But there was one thing that the men were firm in—their indecision.

“We’d like to join; we’d like to do all we can. But things won’t let us.” The speaker shook his head nervously. “No, things won’t let us.”

“You think that by holding back you’ll save your property, your season’s crop and all that,” spoke Ezra Prentiss. “But I believe you are mistaken. Suppose most of the men and boys of the towns held back as you seem inclined to do? What then?”

“It might be a good thing,” answered Josiah, fearfully.

“It is sure to be a very bad thing for you and everybody else. If there is no army to oppose him, Gage will march his regiments out of the city, and he’ll seize, burn and destroy until he has the people of Massachusetts upon their knees.”

The fear that filled the eyes of the two brothers was almost pitiful to see.

“Do you think that will happen?” asked one.

“I sincerely do,” returned Ezra, who, to tell the truth, was rather disgusted at this exhibition of selfish cowardice.

The farmers consulted together in whispers. Then Josiah said:

“As my brother remarked, we’d like to do all we can. But we have doubts. It’s not altogether our property that holds us back.”

“What then?” asked Ezra.

The man looked toward his brother, who nodded what was intended to be encouragement; but it was of a very timorous sort, indeed.

“Things hereabouts are not altogether right,” said Josiah, lowering his voice to a whisper and leaning over the fence that Ezra might hear. “They haven’t been just what you might call right for some time.”

Ezra regarded him wonderingly.

“Nothing has been right in all the colony for some time,” said he. “So what you say is not surprising.”

The man coughed dryly and waved his hand.

“You don’t quite understand what I mean,” said he. “What you refer to is what everybody has seen, and everybody knows. But what I refer to is what nobody but my brother and I have seen, and what, more than likely, nobody else has any idea of.”

“Something that has to do with the public good?” inquired Ezra.

The man hesitated; but his brother made answer for him.

“Yes,” spoke he, “you might call it that.”

Ezra led his horse nearer to the fence and threw the rein over a post.

“Perhaps,” said he, “you wouldn’t mind being a little more definite.”

Once more the men consulted in whispers.

“He’s only a boy,” Ezra heard Josiah protest.

“But he’s from the head of matters at Boston,” argued the other, in a low but perfectly distinct tone. “They seem to trust him, so why not we?”

This seemed unanswerable reasoning; so Josiah again turned to the lad.

“Do you know this section very well?” he asked.

“No,” replied Ezra.

“Well, we do,” said the man. “In fact, we were born and raised hereabouts. And we know every man-jack for miles around.”

“Naturally,” said the boy.

“So,” proceeded Josiah, “if a stranger comes to live here, particularly a queer-acting stranger, we’d be likely to take notice of him. And if he rented the next place to ours,” with a jerk of the head down the wagonway, “we’d be likely to more than particularly take notice.”

“Well?” asked Ezra, patiently.

“Some time ago, just such a man did just that very thing,” said the farmer earnestly. “He is odd. He’s not friendly. He keeps great dogs and, save for them, seems to live alone. But now and then strangers come. They always come after dark and are gone by daylight. Who they are, and what they are, we never have been able to find out.”

“It does seem rather queer,” admitted Ezra. “But I can scarcely see just how it can have anything to do with the matter between the colonies and the King’s government.”

“Neither do we,” confessed Josiah. “We can’t see it either. But we feel it. It’s just as though we were being watched, somehow. We feel that everything we do is taken note of by somebody we can’t place. And we think,” again fearfully nodding down the wagonway, “that it’s that man.”

Ezra studied the men carefully. That they were of a tight-fisted, timorous sort, he had already made up his mind; but he had not given them credit for so much imagination as they displayed. However, that they were sincere was not to be denied.

He remained for some time, questioning them curiously; at length he mounted his horse and prepared to move on.

“It’s more than likely,” said he, settling himself in the saddle, “that this man’s strange way of living has gradually brought you to thinking other strange things of him.” He gathered up his reins; the bay moved forward a few steps; then he was brought to a halt once more, and the boy turned, one hand resting on its flank. “Where did you say he lived?” he asked with a careless air.

“About three miles below there,” said Josiah’s brother, pointing down the road. “You come to a wood, then to a stream of water, crossed by a bridge, and just above it is the house, by the roadside. But don’t stop. Because if the dogs are loose, which they generally are, coming on night, there’s no telling what they’ll do.”

“Thanks,” replied Ezra. “I’ll look out for them.” He waved his hand. “Good-bye, and give the Committee’s circular another reading. There are truths in it that can’t be denied.”

Then with a glance at the fast lowering sun, he touched the bay with the spur and turned down the narrow road.

CHAPTER II—SHOWS HOW EZRA MET WITH GILBERT SCARLETT, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

“I sincerely trust,” mused Ezra Prentiss as he rode along on his way, “that there are not many men like those in the colonies. If there are, the cause is sure to be defeated. They are too cowardly and selfish to do anything but clutch what they have and cry out in fear of its being taken away from them.”

For a moment a shadow rested upon his face. Then the picture flashed across his mind of the heroic line at Lexington, of the desperate rush at Concord Bridge, the long, running fight into Boston town. These had happened only a few weeks before; and a smile banished the shadow instantly.

“The men who did those things were neither selfish nor cowardly,” he told himself. “They are as brave as any upon the earth, and would give all they possessed in the cause of freedom. They drove Earl Percy before them when they were merely a gathering of half-armed farmers; and when drilled and properly equipped, they will prove their worth to General Gage, his army and the hostile King.”

Several times he left the road and crossed some fields at sight of chimney-stacks or shingled roofs; and each time he talked earnestly with the householders and left one or more of the circulars printed by the Committee of Safety. But each time he returned to the wagon road.

“It’s not because I expect to come upon any great number of people,” he said, as the question as to why he did this presented itself to him. “And it is not because it is an easy road to travel.” He paused for a moment and then added: “I wonder just how much this stranger, who lives so oddly and in such a queer place, has to do with it?”

He laughed as the tall bay took a fence and landed once more in the much-cut road.

“That’s it,” he continued. “It’s curiosity. I want to see the man who has made those two, back there, fear him so.”

He had perhaps gone a mile and a half in a straight course, when the fences began to thin; trees lined the roadside and grew in thick clumps upon every hand; the ground looked rough and stony; apparently no plow had ever broken it, no axe had ever been leveled against the timber.

Heavy boughs, showing the first green of spring, hung so low that Ezra was forced to bend low in his saddle in order to avoid them. He was riding in this fashion when he was suddenly startled by a voice, apparently only a few yards away, calling to him.

“Hullo, you, sir!”

Ezra drew in the bay and turned in his saddle. A tall, strongly-built young man in long leather boots, and wearing a hat with a plume in it, was standing beside a fallen horse.

“A moment of your time, if you please,” commanded this personage, in a voice that was not to be denied.

“You have met with an accident, I see,” remarked Ezra, with a glance at the prostrate beast. “Is he badly hurt?”

“I think he is all but finished,” replied the young man in the long boots. “He was recommended to me as a nag of perfect quality; but I have found none such in this sadly deserted corner of the earth.”

The speaker wore moustaches, something seldom or never seen in those days. They were black, with spiky points, and he twisted at them savagely.

“But I have found in my journeys through the world that good horses are only grown where there are fine up-standing men to see to them,” continued the stranger. He drew up his soft leather boots and shifted his heavy sword belt, which bore a huge brass buckle. Then he devoted his attention to the moustaches once more.

“You are not of the colonies, then?” inquired Ezra.

The other drew himself up haughtily and stared at the speaker.

“I trust, sir,” spoke he in a measured voice, “that I do not convey that impression. I am Gilbert Scarlett, late of the Spanish service and once of those of Hanover, Wurtemberg, Portugal and the Swiss. Also two campaigns have I served with the Turks in Egypt, and once I bore a commission from the Czar of Muscovy.”

Ezra regarded the other with wonderment. That so young a man could have had so wide a military experience seemed extraordinary indeed. But, in spite of the boastful tone and exaggerated manner, there was that about the stranger that might make a doubter pause.

“I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Scarlett,” said Ezra Prentiss, politely. “And I must say that I am rather astonished to see a man of your parts in so unusual a place.”

“You might well be,” returned the other, slapping his boot-leg with his riding-whip. “And truth to tell, I am a trifle astonished myself. But matters between the Spanish and the French grew very monotonous toward the last, below there in the Floridas and on the Gulf. They made war very politely and saw to it that there was plenty of breathing time between cannon-shots. So I took ship and came north. They told me that the clouds were gathering here and that there would be much credit for a man of my inches to gain, in one way and another.”

“If you look for fighting,” said Ezra, soberly, “I fancy you’ll get your fill of it before many days.”

The other laughed and leaned gracefully against a tree. He had thick black brows, and he bent them at the young New Englander jeeringly.

“Fighting!” mocked he. “Where is it to come from? Gage has an army of veterans and dare not come out. This other man——”

“General Ward?” suggested Ezra, as the other hesitated.

“Yes—thanks. General Ward has gathered a rabble of peasants which would tear off like sheep at the first sound of a heavy gun.”

“You are wrong,” cried Ezra warmly. “I saw them under fire. They acted the part of men.”

“I’ve heard of that fight,” said the young man. “Pshaw! Such a thing is not a test. Wait until they are forced to sleep out under the stars, to mount guard in the wet, to obey popinjay officers, to keep hungry bellies for days on end, to be sick without physic, to be cold without clothing, to be beaten and asked to fight again. That will show the color of their courage, sir. Your General Ward may be satisfied with less; but nothing short of all I’ve mentioned would answer the needs of an old campaigner.”

To hear him with his youthful face, and sprouting moustaches, calling himself by such a name, caused Ezra to smile. Instantly the face of Gilbert Scarlett changed.

“But it seems that I am wasting good time speaking with you,” said he, coldly. “I find that men of experience are not understood by colonials.” His hard, black eyes ran over the lines of the tall bay horse which Ezra bestrode, and he proceeded, “That is a fair-looking charger. Anyhow, it’s the best to be had at this time, I suppose. So do me the favor to get down.”

Ezra looked at the speaker in some surprise.

“Perhaps you will explain,” said he.

“The situation is so plain,” proclaimed Gilbert Scarlett, “that I can scarcely see the need of an explanation. But, since you ask for one, here it is. My horse can go no farther. Yours can. So, as I have urgent affairs to transact, I propose that we make an exchange.”

“It would seem that your military schooling has taught you to expect the better of a bargain, if nothing else,” said Ezra quietly.

The other laughed.

“It would have been of very little value if it hadn’t,” said he. He once more hitched at his sword belt, and this time the movement held the elements of a threat. “But,” he went on, “that is neither here nor there. We will come to the exchange at once, if you please.”

“I am glad that you mentioned that last,” smiled Ezra. “Suppose I don’t please?”

The points of the spiky moustache went up and the heavy black brows came down.

“In that event,” said Gilbert Scarlett, “I shall be forced to alter your mind.”

A little earlier, Ezra had had before him a youthful, careless face, had listened to boastful, empty speech and had smiled. But in an instant all was altered. The face was now hard and lined; the careless mouth was tight shut and cruel looking, the voice was sharp and peremptory.

“Once more—and for the last time, mark you—I invite you to get down.”

“I think your contempt for colonials has led you astray,” said Ezra, still with a smile. “We do not give up our belongings so easily in this part of the world.”

The man took a step forward, his breath seeming to hiss between his teeth; then his sword flashed out of its scabbard. But at the same instant Ezra’s long holster pistol came into play. The afternoon light gleamed dully upon the steel barrel, as he supported it in the hollow of his left arm.

“Before you display any of your deftness with the sword blade,” spoke the young New Englander, coolly, “listen to a few words of disinterested advice. I say disinterested, because it makes no difference to me how you take it. But it would, perhaps, be a great deal better for you if you reconsidered this matter. A gentleman of your confessed military experience can no doubt play the sword with accuracy. But don’t forget that a bullet travels faster—and don’t compel me to start this one on its travels.”

The young stranger listened to this quietly-spoken warning with varying expressions of face. At first it seemed that he would defy the pistol; indeed he drew back his arm for a blow. Then he paused, baffled; at last a comical look came upon his face, his point touched the ground and he stepped back with a ringing laugh.

“For your advice I offer many thanks.” He took off his hat as he spoke and its plume swept the earth. “And I will take it,” driving his blade back in its sheath. “I have made a grave military blunder. In what you call my contempt for colonials I overlooked the possibility of your being armed. I admit defeat and pray you mercy.”

The situation was so quaint a one that Ezra also laughed. But he did not take his eyes from the other, neither did his pistol go back to its place in the holster.

“The situation remains as it was when I came up,” said the boy. “Here you stand beside your fallen horse and off I go on my way to Chelmsford.”

He touched the bay with the spur; but it had only taken a few steps when Gilbert Scarlett once more lifted his voice. Ezra drew rein and the man advanced.

“You are going toward Chelmsford?” inquired he.

“Yes,” returned Ezra.

“By this road?”

“If I can.”

“It always shows good quality in a soldier to be generous to a defeated foe,” smiled the young man. He paused a moment and studied Ezra carefully; and as he did so the latter noted an odd light dancing in his eyes. “As I have said,” Scarlett resumed, “I have urgent affairs that under other circumstances would require me to press on. And as I can’t do this, I would ask you to grant me a favor.”

“What is it?” asked Ezra.

“At Cambridge I was entrusted with a mission of more or less importance,” spoke Scarlett easily. “And as the gentleman who so entrusted me was most genial and generous, though to speak the truth I did not know him from Adam’s elder brother, I would like to see the matter carried through as contracted.”

He drew from his belt a packet of papers sealed with black wax.

“I was required to take this way and ride until I came to a certain bridge,” said Scarlett. “Not far from this I was to come upon a house where I was to stop and ask for a man by the name of Abdallah. When I saw him I was to hand over these,” and the speaker held up the packet.

At sight of the packet and Scarlett's announcement that he had been bidden to come that way, Ezra's attention became fixed. The two farmers had spoken of unknown riders who came and went to their mysterious neighbor's. But when the other mentioned the bridge and the house not far from it, the boy's eyes snapped with expectation. However, when he spoke his voice was unconcerned enough.

"And now, I suppose, you want me to undertake to finish what you have begun?" said he.

"If you will be so kind," replied Scarlett, with a little bow. "It will not take you out of your way, since you are going by this road, and it will greatly relieve my mind."

Ezra bent forward and took the papers in his left hand. Thrusting them into the breast of his coat, he said with a laugh:

"It would show a sad lack of charity on my part to leave you in a disturbed state of mind. A disabled horse and a long road are calamities enough for any man."

"I thank you," said Scarlett. He tugged at his moustache with one hand; the thumb of the other was stuck in his sword belt, his legs were very wide apart, and the plumed hat was set well back upon his head. "You are a ready youth and a generous one. Perhaps your wit is not all that it will be in the years to come. Nevertheless, I say that you are a ready youth. And further, I will add that you have the makings in you of a most excellent soldier."

Once more the long plume swept the ground as Ezra, with a wave of the hand, rode away; and the last the boy saw of him he was stripping the saddle from the fallen horse and apparently railing against his ill luck in a most hearty fashion.

CHAPTER III—TELLS HOW EZRA ENTERED THE HOUSE OF ABDALLAH

"Rather an odd character, I should think," mused the young New Englander as he rode along. "A soldier of fortune from his own account; and from my own observations, one ready enough to provide himself with anything that he lacked. But he seemed rather a good sort, for all," with a laugh, "even if he did draw his blade on me and afterward cast reflections upon my wit. I'm sure if I saw more of him I'd come to like him."

The pace was slow on account of the bad condition of the road; and gradually the sun slipped downward in the west. At length, in a gloomy, sunken place, Ezra came upon a forbidding-looking stream flowing into a shattered dam.

A treacherous-looking bridge of unstripped timber crossed it; and a little to the left was an abandoned mill with staring, empty windows; its broken roof was covered with green moss, a wheel hanging rotten and silent at its side.

"And some little way along I am to find a house by the roadside, am I?" said the lad as he looked about upon this sullen picture. "Well, it takes different tastes to make a world, of course; but I'd never have thought that any one would select a spot like this for a dwelling-place."

Gingerly the bay picked its way across the bridge; the aged timbers swayed and groaned; through the open seams between the planks, the dark water could be seen flowing sluggishly along.

Just beyond the bridge the road took an abrupt bend; and as Ezra rounded this he found himself in sight of the house.

He had only time to note that it was two stories in height and that heavy shutters guarded all the windows, when there came a most tremendous barking of dogs. Lion-like, three enormous mastiffs leaped the low fence that ran about the house and rushed at horse and rider.

The bay reared, his nostrils widening and his eyes shining with fright. Ezra tightened the rein, spoke soothingly to him and at the same time reached for his holster pistol. With wide jaws the great beasts bounded forward; then came a sharp whistle and instantly they paused, growling, indeed, and with savage eyes, but advancing no farther.

From around one corner of the house came a man of commanding stature and remarkable appearance. He was attired in a long, loose, robe-like garment such as Ezra had seen in pictures of Eastern peoples. His head was entirely bald, though the face was smooth, unlined and gave few signs of age. His complexion was swarthy and his eyes singularly large, dark and gentle-looking.

"I ask your pardon, young sir," said this strange-looking personage smoothly. "My poor beasts are a trifle unruly at times. But," reassuringly, "believe me, there is no harm in them."

Ezra looked down into the bloodshot eyes and formidable jaws of the brutes. He said nothing in answer to the man's statement; but he held to his own opinion, nevertheless.

The man advanced to the fence, and Ezra noted that he wore no shoes. His feet were bound in

sandals; also he was belted with a thick cord into which was stuck an ancient-looking, leather-covered book.

But the stranger's most striking and noticeable feature was his soft gentleness of manner. Ezra felt this the moment his eyes rested upon the swarthy face; it were as though nothing could excite its owner to anger or intolerance. And yet, for all that, as the boy gazed at the strangely-clad one, that distinct feeling of repulsion came upon him which we feel in the presence of those whom we naturally distrust.

Here the man spoke to the dogs which still stood near at hand, growling and casting savage looks at Ezra.

"Blood," said he, gently, "go in, brave dog. Death, away with you. Bones, be gone."

The voice was soft, even purring; but the grisly names of the brutes caused Ezra to shudder.

Obediently the animals turned and leaped into the enclosure once more. And as they passed their master, Ezra noted that they crouched and fawned.

"Only beaten dogs do that," thought the boy. Then, as he surveyed the man carefully, "I wonder just how much of this gentleness is real and how much assumed?"

As the mastiffs vanished behind the house, the man turned to Ezra once more.

"The road is seldom frequented," said he, apologetically; "and so, poor beasts, they are not accustomed to travelers." The soft, dark eyes examined Ezra with much attention; then the speaker went on, "I sincerely trust that you have taken neither harm nor offense."

"Not in the least," replied Ezra readily. "My horse was a bit startled; but that is all."

Instantly the dark eyes went to the horse; its weary condition seemed to excite the stranger's sympathy.

"You have ridden far?" said he, gently.

"From Cambridge," replied Ezra. "But it has taken several days."

"And you are going——?" Here the other paused with undoubted expectancy.

"Toward Chelmsford," replied Ezra.

The man seemed baffled; he passed one hand over his shining bald head as though in meditation. But the singular dark eyes never left the boy's face.

"This is rather an unusual way to select," he said at last. "Rough and indirect."

"Perhaps so," said Ezra. "But I had some small matters of business hereabouts."

An eager look came into the man's face; he held up one hand with an inquiring gesture.

"You were to ask for some one?" said he.

"Yes. For a gentleman of the name of Abdallah."

"I am he," said the other humbly. "Abdallah—son of Hamid—a poor scholar, and a friend to all the world."

Ezra took out the packet from the breast of his coat; riding close to the fence he gave it into Abdallah's hands.

"I thank you," said the man. "I had been expecting you for some days."

His fingers pattered nervously upon the papers; it was plain to see that he was all eagerness to tear them open that he might come at their contents.

But he restrained himself; with calm eyes he looked at Ezra and said:

"Perhaps it was part of your instructions that you bear back any answer to these that might be necessary."

Ezra hesitated for a moment. His first impulse was to make a plain statement of the facts, to tell him how he met Scarlett by the wayside, relate how the papers had been handed over to him, and why. But second thought prompted him to take advantage of the other's mistake. What the lad had heard of Abdallah had interested him exceedingly. If there were anything unusual in his transactions, or anything against the public good, here was a most excellent opportunity of throwing a light upon the matter.

So, like a flash, he made up his mind.

“I was given no instructions by the gentleman who entrusted me with this errand,” said he, “save only that I was to hand the packet to you.”

Abdallah nodded his head.

“It is well to be careful. I have always approved of such a method,” spoke he.

The great dark eyes were fixed upon Ezra’s face; for all their gentleness, the boy fancied that he caught an element of speculation in them. But before he had time to note more, the man proceeded:

“I am a reader of faces and you have a faithful look. You are of the type that would be apt to do anything that he engaged to do.” He tapped the papers upon the palm of one hand for a moment, as though considering; then proceeded: “Will you carry the answer to the person who gave these?” And the eyes narrowed.

“He was an utter stranger to me,” said Ezra. “I would not know where to look for him.”

The man laughed softly and seemed satisfied.

“In matters like this,” said he, “it is not always wise to give names or addresses. It might prove inconvenient. However, it does not matter. I will so advise you as to the answer that you cannot well go astray.”

With that Ezra dismounted without more ado. Tying his horse to the gate-post, he followed the man through a low, wide doorway into the house.

The boy was open-eyed for something unusual. What he had heard of Abdallah, and, indeed, the man’s personal appearance, led him to be so; and he was not disappointed.

Without, the house was clumsy and ill-shaped, the product perhaps of an uncouth workman of past generations. It was also neglected, unpainted and weather-stained. The enclosure about it was yellow with the weeds of a summer before.

But within all was different. The shutters did not admit a ray of light; candles, set in queer twisted sconces of copper, burned behind rose-colored shades of glass. Large mirrors glittered upon the walls; the doorways were hung with rich draperies; a soft Turkey carpet and rich rugs were upon the floor. Several broad couches covered with crimson leather stood about.

And books were everywhere—upon shelves, upon tables and chairs; faded scrolls covered with strange Oriental characters were scattered about; queer manuscripts, musty and tattered, lay open to view where some one had been lately consulting them.

On a broad, brick hearth stood a small furnace with a leather bellows attached. Beside this were queer instruments and vessels of metal and glass at whose uses the boy could only guess.

“Be seated, I beg of you,” spoke Abdallah, with grave courtesy. “It is but a poor place to ask a guest; but to what there is, you are welcome indeed.”

Ezra sat down upon one of the couches. It was soft and extremely comforting to one who had been in the saddle since early morning. And as he sat, his eyes went about the apartment wonderingly.

The man noted this and smiled. Ezra hastened to say:

“I ask your pardon. But there is not, I will venture to say, such another place as this in all Massachusetts.”

Abdallah inclined his stately head gravely.

“No doubt you are right,” said he. “In this Western world the lore of the East is all but unknown.” He sighed and shook his head. “All is so new. The men, the customs, the very country. They have no leisure for employment of a deeper sort.”

Ezra looked at the speaker curiously.

“I have heard but little of the unusual sciences of the East,” said he, “and have read very little more. I have no doubt but that they are wonderful and interesting; and I am pleased to meet with a gentleman so learned in them.”

Abdallah made a gesture of protest.

“You give me too much credit,” said he, gravely. “I am but a poor scholar. ’Tis true that some of the mysteries of life have been made known to me. But that is all. I am a struggling student as yet, and cannot hope to be more until years of labor have been gone through.”

Glass vessels containing liquids stood upon a shelf. They were long necked and yet with squat, round bodies; their contents were of amber, purple, jade and other rich colors and they twinkled

and flashed in the subdued light of the candles.

“You practice the art of healing, sir, I perceive,” suggested Ezra, looking at these.

But Abdallah shook his head.

“I am fairly well versed in the business of a leech,” he replied. “But I give but little time to it.”

Illustration: “YOU PRACTICE THE ART OF HEALING, SIR”

Here Ezra caught an odd, muffled, lingering sound. It was low and indistinct. Thinking it was something outside—a bird, a small animal or such—he paid no attention to it. But at the same time he noticed a peculiar expression upon the face of Abdallah, and he also saw the look which the man flashed at him.

“To be a surgeon, or even an apothecary in such a lonely place, would profit mankind or myself very little,” proceeded the man in his usual tone of grave gentleness.

He smiled at the boy, who nodded a reply. Again the odd sound was repeated. It was murmurous and lingering, rising and falling in a measured sort of way.

“It is within the house,” Ezra told himself. “And it is the voice of some one in conversation.”

But he felt the dark eyes of the Oriental fixed upon him and his face never changed. The sound, apparently, was one that Abdallah would prefer to have unheard; so Ezra’s face held nothing but polite interest in the other’s remarks.

“I suppose you are quite right,” said the boy. “And so,” with the suspicions of the farmers well in mind, “you devote your time solely to the study of your philosophy?”

“Entirely so,” replied Abdallah, suavely. “It is a great science, and to get even the rudiments of it, one must spare neither one’s self nor time.”

Again came the murmurous sound. Whoever the talkers were, they seemed to be deep in some discussion. As Ezra watched he saw the habitually gentle look leave the eyes of the Oriental; the pleasant mouth tightened and grew hard, the long-fingered brown hands clenched.

“I will ask your pardon,” said Abdallah in his smooth voice. That he was filled with a bitter anger was plain; but he held himself wonderfully in control. He bent his head in a salaam of much dignity; then drawing aside some hangings that concealed a doorway, he disappeared.

Ezra settled back more comfortably into his easy seat.

“Master Abdallah evidently does not lead the lonely life that my friends of a short time ago supposed,” said he. “If these are not regular inmates of his house, they are persons over whom he professes some control; at least his manner said as much.”

There was a huge clock in the room that ticked with steady, solemn regularity. Now and then a candle sputtered or leaped behind its rose-colored shade. But these were the only sounds that

Ezra heard.

“Whoever it was, he has silenced them,” smiled the boy. “Behind that soft manner, our friend has a temper of his own. I saw that from the first.”

But another moment proved that Abdallah’s was not the only temper in the house. Suddenly the silence was split by a heavy voice, thundering:

“What do you mean, sir? What do you mean by addressing me in that manner?”

A quick, excited murmur followed. Then the heavy voice was heard once more.

“I know we are in his house. I am perfectly aware of it. But that does not deprive me of the right to protect myself from impudence.”

Abdallah’s voice was then heard; but it was pitched so low that Ezra could not catch the words. After a moment the heavy voice came again.

“Of course, sir, that puts a different face upon the matter. But you should have warned us to moderate our tones. Remember, I am Major Buckstone of His Majesty’s Artillery, and I permit no man to hector me.”

“Hush-h-h-h!” came another voice. And then there was a silence.

“It seems that Major Buckstone is a person quite ready and competent to regulate his own affairs,” smiled the boy. Then his brows puckered thoughtfully as he continued: “And the fact that he is of His Majesty’s Artillery makes him a gentleman of whom I should take more than ordinary notice.”

On the whole, as he thought the situation over, all the persons concerned were of great interest to him and to the cause of the colonies. Here was a stranger, an Oriental, who received mysterious communications from equally mysterious horsemen. And here, also, were British officers making his house a place of resort and carrying on conversations which would not allow of being overheard.

“Decidedly,” said Ezra, “it has an interesting look. And I am quite pleased that I chanced to come this way and overtake Master Scarlett as I did.”

His thoughts had run this far when once again the mighty voice of Major Buckstone was heard.

“But, sir,” it cried, “I disagree with you. I utterly disagree with you. You may have your own ways of doing these things. If so, you are perfectly welcome to them. But I am a soldier, sir; an officer in His Majesty’s Artillery, and I am accustomed to do things in my own way.”

A soft protest followed, but the thunderous major cut it short.

“If this gentleman has been trusted thus far, he can be trusted further,” he declared. “Why should we remain concealed in the houses of our friends? It is preposterous!”

A sharp moving about of furniture followed as though some one had pushed back a heavy chair; then footsteps were heard, the hangings parted and a burly, red-faced man entered the room.

CHAPTER IV—TELLS WHAT BEFELL EZRA THEREIN

Directly behind the red-faced man came Abdallah, and a small, weazened-looking youth, with the face of a ferret and the covert manners of a fox.

That Abdallah was not pleased with the situation was very evident. There was an angry light burning in the dark eyes; and though his manner was as suave as ever, his voice, as he spoke, had gained distinctly in sharpness.

“This,” said he, addressing Ezra, who had arisen, “is a gentleman who insisted upon making your acquaintance.”

Major Buckstone laughed loudly, and held out his hand to the boy.

“And that is the plain truth,” spoke he, with great heartiness of manner. “I am a bluff soldier, young sir, and I am always delighted to see those who do their work out in the open.”

As he said this, his eyes went quickly to Abdallah and the ferret-faced young man. It was the latter who made answer.

“In a time like this, Major Buckstone,” said he, “there is work of all sorts to be done for His Majesty, the King. You have your place—we have ours.”

“And you will pardon me for saying it, I’m sure,” said Abdallah, also addressing the major, “but your place is decidedly not here.”

The words were softly spoken; but, for all, there was behind them the bitter resentment of a man not accustomed to being crossed.

Major Buckstone drew himself up, and saluted formally.

“Sir,” he made reply, “you have complimented me highly. You are quite right. This is not my place. In plain words, a man of my quality should never have been detailed upon such duty.”

The ferret-faced youth, his eyes full of alarm, furtively tugged at the speaker’s sleeve; then he whispered some words of caution. But the burly soldier shook him off impatiently.

“I understand you very well, Jason Collyer,” said he with ponderous disdain. “But as I have told you many times in this last twenty-four hours, I will pay no heed to you. I have my own way of conducting my own business, and that I will persist in.”

Abdallah made a sign to the ferret-faced youth, and the latter fell back from the plainspoken major. Then the two drew together at a far corner of the room and consulted in whispers. The major turned to Ezra once more.

“You have ridden from Cambridge, I understand,” said he.

“I have,” replied the lad, briefly.

“It has been a week since I passed through the rebel lines,” said the officer. “I was in disguise,” in a tone of great disgust. “Much rather would I have been in full uniform, and at the head of two regiments of hardy fellows.” Then in another tone, “But what news?”

“The papers, I should think,” and Ezra nodded toward Abdallah, “would tell you everything.”

“Everything of this nature,” and the burly speaker gestured about him in great contempt. “But I want to have as little to do with spying and ferreting as possible. What I want to know is: what has General Gage done to break the preposterous condition at Boston, that the rebels call a siege?”

“Nothing, sir,” replied the boy.

The great, red face grew grim, and the heavy round head wagged from side to side.

“British prestige will suffer for this,” said the major, solemnly. “It will suffer the world over.” Then with a tightening of his jaws, “Come, then, tell me what the rebels have done. I’ll warrant they have been active enough.”

Ezra smiled.

“You are right in that,” said he. “Never were men more busy before. Not a day goes by but that something is done. Earthworks are thrown up, companies are enlisted, stores are gathered, noted men of the colonial wars are offering their swords and their experience.”

This last caused Major Buckstone to grow grimmer than ever.

“And tough fighters, those same rascals are,” said he. “I’ve fought shoulder to shoulder with them, and I know their mettle.”

Then little by little he drew from the boy all the details of what had passed, to the colonists’ credit, since the day that the column under Lord Percy had been driven pell-mell into Boston. But the boy shrewdly neglected to mention anything that would show the real and pitiful weakness of the colonial force. He did not tell how the slackly-disciplined farmers grew tired of the dull routine of the siege and left for their homes in droves. He did not tell how General Ward had written to the Provincial Congress declaring that if this was not somehow stopped he would soon be left all alone. Nor did he say that for sheer want of men, Boston Neck was at times almost unguarded—Boston Neck, the most important avenue of all out of the beleaguered city.

Major Buckstone listened to the rosy story of the colonists’ prowess; his thick iron-gray brows were drawn together in a frown.

“I understand that they have Putnam from Connecticut with them, and that tall fellow John Stark, of New Hampshire, too. Well, they are both nasty fighters; I’ve seen them in the thick of it many a time. The only way to beat such fellows is to prevent them from making a fair beginning.”

Here Abdallah came forward. His dark eyes had grown calm once more; and there was a gentle smile upon his lips.

“In that, Major Buckstone, you are perfectly right,” said he. “Once these men get a fair start in the conducting of a war it will be most difficult to put them down. And to prevent them is our mission.”

The major growled out an angry exclamation. But Abdallah proceeded smoothly.

“When the military force has shown itself to be incompetent,” said he, “such as we step in.” He paid no attention to the glowering look that the major directed upon him for this criticism of the army. “Our work is of such a nature——”

The ferret-faced youth thrust out a thin, large-knuckled hand and tugged at Abdallah’s robe.

“Our work and its nature is well known to us all,” remarked he, with a sharp look at Ezra. “So there is nothing to be gained by talking over it, that I can see.”

Abdallah smiled.

“Right,” said he, “though it is somewhat late in the evening for us to think of becoming secretive. Major Buckstone has seen fit to——”

“We have been all over that, also,” said the major, brusquely. “As I have said before, this lad has been entrusted with other and perhaps cleaner business of the King than this. And I can see no harm in speaking openly before him.”

“You are in command,” said Abdallah, smilingly. “And I defer to you in everything.”

“If you had been bred to the artillery, you would have done that in the first place,” replied Major Buckstone, dryly. “And, now, since that rather important point is settled, let us get to our affairs.”

The seal upon the packet of papers brought by Ezra was now broken and the three bent over them intently. Ezra once more seated himself, watching them keenly, for he was struck by the great difference in their appearance.

Major Buckstone was huge of limb and body; his great red face shone with perspiration; despite his rather uncouth farmer’s dress, he looked every inch a British officer of the old school.

Abdallah’s commanding height would have marked him almost anywhere as a person of unusual parts; and his queer robe-like garment, his bald dome and his singular dark eyes only accentuated this.

And the furtive-mannered Jason Collyer came in for his fair share of the boy’s attention. There was a peculiar something in the sharp face and the light eyes that caused Ezra to class him as dangerous.

“Even, perhaps, more dangerous than Abdallah himself,” thought the boy. “He is of the kind that never trusts any one and would halt at nothing to gain its ends.”

It did not take many minutes for these strangely-contrasted coworkers to master the contents of the documents. Then Major Buckstone drew an ink-pot toward him at a table and took up a broad-nibbed quill pen.

“A line will suffice,” said he to the others. “General Gage will grasp the situation instantly. A single dash upon Boston Neck of a dark night will do the work. If I were only there with my artillery, I would soon have it as wide open as——”

“Hsh-h!” warned Jason Collyer again. And once more he threw a sharp, distrustful look at Ezra.

With a snort of contempt the bluff soldier dipped the broad-nibbed pen deep into the ink-pot; then he dashed off some heavy lines of writing, folded the paper and affixed a seal.

“There,” said he, rising, “that will answer.” He handed the message to Ezra and continued, “Is your horse fresh enough to mount at once?”

Ezra knew that the beast was not; but then he had seen and heard all that was necessary and had no desire to linger in the house of Abdallah.

“He will do until I reach my first stop,” said he.

“Good,” spoke the major as he watched the lad button the message tightly up in his breast pocket. “Make all haste.”

“You may depend upon me to do so,” returned Ezra evenly. “But first you must tell me where I am to go?”

Amazement was written large upon the soldier’s broad, red face at this. His eyes went to Abdallah; and the latter smiled easily.

“It is our way of conducting things,” said he. “We never allow our right hands to know what our left hands are doing.” Then turning to Ezra, he went on, “Return by way of Charlestown. Just outside of that village, near an elevation called Bunker Hill, there is a small place of resort known as the ‘Indian’s Head.’”

“I can find it,” said Ezra.

“Excellent!” Abdallah smiled pleasantly. “At the ‘Indian’s Head’ you will ask for Mr. Pennington.

And when he is pointed out to you—by the landlord, mind you—deliver the message to him."

"Very well," said Ezra.

"You understand perfectly?" inquired Jason Collyer.

"Perfectly," replied Ezra, briefly. Then turning to the others he continued, "If that is all you have to say to me, I will be off at once."

"That is all," said Major Buckstone; and Abdallah smiled and inclined his hairless head.

They held candles for him as he went out, for night had come on.

"Ride carefully," warned Major Buckstone. "It will be a dark night."

"I am used to it," said the boy, as he unfastened the tall bay and climbed into the saddle. "And then, this nag of mine has eyes like an owl."

And so, with a shake of the rein and a wave of the hand to the three, the young patriot was off along the dark road, going by the way he had come.

CHAPTER V—HOW JASON COLLYER CAME TO THE "PLOW AND HARROW"

Once he had gotten the candle-light well out of his eyes, Ezra found that the darkness was not quite as thick as he had supposed.

"All of which suits my purpose very well," he told himself, well pleased.

He had no idea of proceeding any great distance in the direction in which he was heading. He had promised to meet Ben Cooper at the place where the church tower reared itself above the tree-tops toward Chelmsford; and this he determined to do.

"If I fail to keep my promise, Ben will begin to imagine all sorts of things," mused Ezra. "And, also, I'll need to talk over this matter with him before I do anything."

He rode along until his horse's hoofs sounded hollowly upon the timbers of the bridge.

"The sound will no doubt reach the house," he muttered, "and perhaps they will be listening for it."

In the middle of the bridge he wheeled his steed and slowly recrossed; then dismounting he led the animal into the woods and struck out upon a course parallel with the road. The way was much darker here because of the overhang of the trees; he was compelled to proceed with the utmost care in order to avoid accidents.

"I said you had eyes like an owl, old fellow," said he to the bay. "Now prove that I did not overpraise you; for a misstep means, perhaps, a broken leg."

And the horse, as though in answer, stepped gingerly along, his mane brushing Ezra's shoulder, and his nose pointed toward the ground. In a short time they arrived opposite the house of Abdallah; the mastiffs must either have got scent of, or heard them. At any rate they broke into a tremendous barking.

Now Ezra spoke to the bay and it stopped. His hand sought the long pistol in the holster and his eyes were fixed upon the dark, silent house across the road.

Then the door opened and a flare of light shot out upon the neglected garden. Abdallah appeared in the doorway, and behind him was Jason Collyer with a shaded candle in his hand.

The Oriental spoke sharply to the clamoring brutes and they instantly subsided. Some words passed between the two men, and then both went in; and the door was closed and all was darkness and stillness once more.

Ezra waited a while; then, as the dogs appeared to be silenced for good, he spoke to the horse and once more started on. Almost immediately the dogs recommenced their barking and once more the boy brought the bay to a halt. With his hand upon the pistol he watched the house, expecting the door to open. But this time it did not, and the mastiffs made the night echo with their uproar.

"It would seem that they are now tied up," said Ezra after a little. "It is a lucky thing for me that Abdallah was so minded. Otherwise I would have had them at my throat before this."

Again he spoke to the horse and they proceeded upon their way through the trees. The mastiffs grew all but frantic in their ravings; but still no sign came from the house.

"I suppose the owners of such beasts grow accustomed to their noise in time," thought the lad. "And in that I am fortunate, too; for if Abdallah and his friends had taken it into their heads to

make a search, they must have surely found me."

About a hundred yards beyond the house he ventured into the road. As this was soft and he walked the horse, no sound of hoofs was heard. It was a good half mile farther on that he got into the saddle, and gathered up the reins with a breath of satisfaction.

"Now for the hamlet with the church tower," he said, and he touched the bay with the spur and went loping down the dark wagonway.

There were stars in the sky, but no moon; a faint sheen filtered through to the earth, and as the road was of a light-colored soil, the boy could trace it faintly as it stretched on ahead of him. From among the trees that still continued to line the way, there came the mysterious shadows and sounds of the night; but Ezra Prentiss was not a lad to give such things much heed, but went plodding steadily on, his eyes bent keenly ahead, his whole attention given to making his destination in as short a time as possible.

A number of times he fancied that he caught dull, indefinite sounds in his rear; indeed, he once drew in his horse and listened. But as nothing more followed, he credited the noises to the whispering voice of the night, and so rode on.

At length he came to a place where the timber had been cleared away; fences were erected and the ground broken by the plow. Off to the left was a small group of houses, and above them, strongly marked against the background of stars, was the church tower that he had pointed out to Ben.

"Plowed ground is slow traveling," he said to himself as he slipped from the saddle, "but as I don't know the roads hereabouts, it's the best I can do."

But as luck would have it, he found a place in the fence where the rails could be slipped.

"A gate," said the boy, well pleased. "Well, that can mean only one thing; there's a path hereabouts, somewhere."

He mounted once more and gave the horse its head. In a moment it had picked out the path, invisible to Ezra, and went plodding along with lowered head. This led across some half dozen fields; at each fence Ezra was forced to get down and lower the bars. At length he found himself in the midst of what seemed a level green. There were scattered houses all about, their windows cheerfully lighted; the doors of some of them stood open, for the night was not unpleasant.

"And there is my old acquaintance, the church," said Ezra, as he noted a large lantern swinging over a doorway. "And judging from the people passing in, there is a service going forward."

He led his horse across the green and finally encountered a man bearing a lantern.

"I ask your pardon, sir," said the boy, "but is there any place of public entertainment in this village?"

"There is," replied the man with the light. "Directly before you—where you see the door standing open—is the 'Plow and Harrow.'"

"I thank you," said Ezra.

He made his way to the place indicated. It was a two-storied, clean-looking place with a sanded floor, polished oaken tables and a stout, white-aproned landlord.

A thin man, with a straw in his mouth, took the horse, and Ezra entered the inn. At once his eye fell upon Ben Cooper, seated at a table, with a rasher of bacon and a dish of eggs before him.

"Hello," said Ben, pausing in his attack on the provisions. "You've got here at last, have you? I'd almost given up hope of you for the night, and so ordered my supper."

"And very good it looks," said Ezra, regarding hungrily the bacon, the eggs, the huge white loaf and the great square of golden butter.

The stout landlord approached, wiping his hands upon his apron. He smiled in a pleased fashion at Ezra's words.

"Can I bring you some, young gentleman?" asked he, good-humoredly. "The bacon is most excellent. It has just the faintest tang of the smoke in it, and that adds vastly to its flavor. The eggs are fresh laid; the bread is our own baking, and the butter of this countryside is the best in all the colony, perhaps."

"How could I say no, after that?" laughed Ezra. "As you put it, it is really fascinating. But first I'll have some water, a towel and soap."

In a little while, freshened up with these latter articles, he was seated opposite Ben, with the wholesome food before him and doing it the justice that its excellent qualities deserved.

“I don’t know how you found it,” said Ben, as their meal proceeded, “but the people along the road I took are heart and soul with the colony. Almost everywhere, I heard of men settling their affairs that they might be off to the army.”

“That’s good news,” said Ezra. “Settling their affairs, eh? Very likely, then, what I heard General Ward say about a week ago is pretty close to the truth. Speaking of the many desertions, he said that very likely they were caused by the men having been called away from home at a moment’s notice to repulse the Lexington column. No one had time to make preparations; some left their families without even a good-bye, others were known to have mounted their plow horses, leaving the plows in the field.”

“The circulars, which I read and distributed, seemed to touch the right spot,” said Ben Cooper. “The people seemed to realize that if they let the army under Gage get the better of them now, their liberties would be gone forever. All are patriots in this section.”

Ezra made no answer to this, but went on with his supper. There was an expression upon his face, however, that caught Ben’s attention; the latter gazed curiously at his friend for a moment and then asked:

“What is it? Come now, don’t deny that you’ve got news of some sort. When you take on that look, I’m sure that something has happened.”

Ezra smiled.

“This time,” said he, “you are right. Something has happened.” He leaned across the table and lowered his voice. “You say that all in this section are patriots. But I have found a nest of British spies right in the heart of it.”

Ben stared at him.

“There are Tories everywhere,” said he, at length.

“I am not speaking of Tories,” said Ezra, “but of what looks like a regularly organized system of British espionage.”

Then he related his experiences to Ben, who sat in round-eyed wonder, drinking in the story. When he had finished there was a long silence; then Ben said:

“It seems to be a sort of place of call for them, with an officer of the British service in command?”

Ezra nodded.

“But,” continued Ben, “it all seems very queer to me. Why is such a strange person as you describe this Abdallah to be concerned in it? And why is a place, so out of the way as that one, selected as a headquarters?”

“To be out of the way, must be an advantage in a matter of their kind,” smiled Ezra.

“No doubt. But that is not just what I mean. This adventurer, Gilbert Scarlett, for example, brings a packet of papers from Cambridge. They are read upon your delivering them; and you are sent with an answer to a gentleman at a place near Charlestown. Why is that? It would have been much simpler and less inconvenient to have sent the message to the ‘Indian’s Head’ in the first place.”

Again Ezra nodded.

“I get your point,” he said. “And I have been thinking over the same thing ever since I left Abdallah’s house.”

Ben glanced quickly at his friend; there was that in his tone that attracted his attention.

“And you have made up your mind to something, I know,” said he.

“Not altogether. But I have figured out some possibilities. This spy system, while under the supervision of a British officer, has been organized by Abdallah. He was imported by Gage for just this purpose. It is possible that it is his profession. Experience has probably taught him to isolate himself. But his spies, who are perhaps unknown to each other, are scattered all about. When they have anything to report, they send a rider who can be trusted; and he in turn carries the answer, if one is called for, to a person who stands close to Gage and his counselors.”

Ben rapped the oaken table smartly with his knuckles by way of applause.

“Good!” cried he. “That is just the way of it!” He looked at his friend in high admiration for a moment. “And it is very fortunate that you stumbled across it. Yes,” thoughtfully, as he renewed his inroads on the bacon, “Abdallah is the chief spy, as you think. His little tilts with Major Buckstone show that plainly enough.”

They discussed the matter for a long time, over the remnants of their meal. The fact that the

British had discovered the practically unguarded condition of Boston Neck worried the boys not a little. One swift rush of the trained regiments of the King might undo all the good that had been accomplished. They spoke in low voices, for the landlord, and now and then some other of the inn people, were constantly about; at length some patrons entered and took seats at no great distance.

Safe in a hamlet where practically all were united in hatred of the laws of Parliament, the boys gave little heed to those who came or went. The newcomers ordered elaborately of the fare of the "Plow and Harrow"; the host, in high good humor, bustled about giving them his best attention.

"Your horses, gentlemen," said he, "should be rubbed down and unsaddled. It will do them much good."

"Leave them as they are," said one of the strangers; "we may require them at——"

The thin hand of one of his fellows tugged at his sleeve.

"Sh-h-h!" whispered the owner of the hand, warningly.

The first speaker laughed.

"But you are right," admitted he, with great candor. "It is a well established fault of mine that I talk too much."

It so chanced that Ben Cooper sat facing the strangers. He caught the landlord's words and the answer that followed. He also heard the warning "Sh-h-h!" and saw the tug at the speaker's sleeve.

Lowering his voice, he described the scene to Ezra.

"Why," said the latter, "there is something familiar about that."

"Just what I thought," agreed Ben. "The warning reminds me a great deal of what you have just told me of your acquaintance Jason Collyer."

"I wonder," said Ezra, "could it, by any chance, be he?"

"If it is, he has followed you," replied Ben.

As Ezra was opposite his friend, his back was to the newcomers; but some little distance away there was a broad framed mirror, and by sitting in a certain way he discovered that he could get a very good view of them, indeed.

There were four in the party and all were attired in the soiled dress of farm laborers. However, three of them bore themselves in a swaggering manner much out of keeping with their apparent station. And all of them wore pistols belted at their waists. The fourth man, and much the smaller, sat in a shadow and for a time Ezra could not make him out. However, he finally turned his head to reply to a remark of one of his companions and his countenance was fairly reflected in the glass. There was no mistaking the furtive eyes and ferret features. It was Jason Collyer.

When the lad made this discovery known to Ben, the latter became greatly excited.

"He's followed you. You thought he suspected you all along, and you were right."

"And who, I wonder, are these others that he has brought with him?" said Ezra, regarding the reflections in the glass with much interest. "They look like tall, active fellows, and of a stamp that would not hesitate at a trifle like a man's life."

"Would they dare, do you think, attack us here?"

"Why not? Jason Collyer has learned that I did not ride in the direction of Charlestown. He probably suspected my presence among the trees opposite Abdallah's house when they came out and then made a quiet investigation later. That is why no one answered the second cry of the mastiffs. When he learned positively that I was not what I seemed, he gathered this small, but very competent-looking force and made after me. In his eyes I am a dangerous person; and in days like these, dangerous persons are not treated very gently, as you know."

"True enough," replied Ben, his round face seeming to grow rounder as he examined the strangers. "But, still, there is so much danger of a hue and cry being started in a place like this."

"They have not overlooked that," Ezra told him quietly. "The fact that they desired the landlord to leave their horses ready for mounting proves that."

"Well, what do you think we'd better do?" asked Ben, a combative expression coming into his face.

"Nothing as yet. We must first see what they intend doing, and act accordingly."

They had no great while to wait, for one of the men arose and came toward their table. He leaned

familiarly upon it, gazing into each of their faces in turn. He was a hard-featured man with a great thatch of reddish hair; and a wide, mocking sort of grin displayed a set of strong, yellow teeth.

“I give you good-evening,” said he, the grin growing wider.

“Good-evening to you,” replied Ezra, with great coolness.

The man examined them once more. Then he continued:

“You are strangers hereabouts, I take it.”

Ezra leaned back and regarded the speaker in turn.

“And, sir,” said he, “I’d take the same of you.”

The mocking grin lost a little of its tone; and a flush came into the coarse, heavy-featured face.

“Hah!” said the man. “You are very apt in your answers, I see.”

“It’s a habit that’s like to grow upon one after a little experience with the world,” answered Ezra, evenly.

“You are very young to have had much experience of any sort,” spoke the man. He pushed back the platters and cups in a most offensive way and seated himself upon a corner of the table.

“Age does not always bring experience, any more than it brings manners,” returned Ezra, pointedly.

The grin disappeared entirely; two points of anger showed in the man’s eyes.

“You grow more and more apt in your sayings,” spoke he. Then in a jeering way: “I have no doubt but that you think yourself a smart and proper youth, indeed.”

“And you may also have no doubt, sir,” replied the boy, “that there are many things that pass through your mind that give me very little concern.”

A subdued burst of laughter came from the man’s comrades; his face darkened and he rose up from the table, his hands clenched. What he would have done Ezra never knew; just then the lad caught the reflection of Jason Collyer in the mirror; he was beckoning the man away. And, with a shrug of the shoulders and a snap of his strong jaws, he obeyed.

“They aim to fasten a quarrel upon us,” breathed Ben. “Have you your pistol?”

“No,” replied Ezra. “It is in my holster.”

“And mine,” said Ben. “I had no idea that we’d ever need them here.”

Ben was ready enough when left to himself but when accompanied by Ezra, usually left the planning of any important step to him. And now, as he looked at him, expecting some ready ruse that would enable them to evade danger, he was not disappointed. Ezra’s face was confident and unruffled. Indeed, there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes, as he said:

“I want you to make some sort of an excuse to go outside. It must be a good one or they will prevent your going. When you get there, slip off the bridles of two of their horses and loosen their saddle girths. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly,” answered Ben.

The four men were whispering together and casting undisguisedly hostile glances at the boys. The landlord and some of the inn’s people who lingered about noticed this, and began to exhibit concern.

Ben Cooper arose with much self-possession.

“Landlord,” said he, “what is our bill? Your inn is a fairly good one, but much too uncomfortable for persons who desire to be unmolested.”

The stout host mentioned the sum, and Ben put a hand in his pocket. A look of dismay came into his face, and turning quickly to Ezra he said:

“I’ll have to see to my saddle-bags. I’m growing very careless of late.”

He hastily crossed to the door, and went out. The hard-faced man rose and went to a window overlooking the space before the inn; he stood there with his back turned to those in the room, his whole attitude indicative of watchfulness.

“That won’t do,” said Ezra to himself. “If my plan is to come to anything he must not stand there.”

He was casting about in his mind for a means of drawing the man's attention from Ben, when Jason Collyer spoke to the host.

"Landlord, I take it that you are not troubled a great deal with Tories in these parts."

"No, gentlemen," replied the stout man fervently, "I am thankful to say that we are not. Those who were of that way of thinking went their way into Boston; you see, it was made unpleasant for them hereabouts. If they loved Gage and his army so well, we thought it better that they should be there where they could see them every day."

"And quite right," spoke Jason Collyer. Ezra noticed that he no longer took the trouble to keep in the background. At first he had done so, but now, apparently, his plans had changed. "Quite right," repeated Jason Collyer. "Such folks are most dangerous, and scarcely of the kind that honest folk care to mingle with."

From indications, the subject of Tories was one that had great interest for the stout host of the "Plow and Harrow." He puffed out his cheeks and smoothed the white apron carefully.

"Preserve me from any such!" said he. "They come sneaking into one's house, prying and asking questions. And all the time they have it in their hearts to send one to the gallows. They should be dealt with hardly!"

"They are a poisonous tribe," said Jason Collyer. He darted a covert look at Ezra as he said this, and the boy noted a smile of satisfaction upon his thin lips. Like an inspiration, the other's intention flashed upon the boy.

"He's sounded the landlord upon this subject with one thought in his mind," Ezra told himself. "He'll tell him that Ben and I are Tories; and so these friends of his will be left to work their wills with us."

Ezra was not a lad to sit and ponder while something to his injury was going forward. With the solution of the other's plan, came a counterplot with which he hoped to balk it.

"If you will pardon me, sir," spoke he, leaning forward, his elbows upon the table, "I would like to agree with you in what you have said. The greatest enemies of the colonies are those who should naturally be at one with us—the Tories."

"Truly spoken, young gentleman," beamed the landlord, "and very well spoken too."

Jason Collyer was about to say something, but Ezra calmly waved him down, riveting the host's attention with a look.

"And, as you say, sir," with a little bow, "they intrude themselves into one's very house with the basest of intentions against one's peace. And they come when least expected, also in many guises."

He looked coolly toward the man who still stood watching from the window, and proceeded, slightly lifting his voice:

"It is all but impossible to detect them in time. One seldom suspects them. For example," and he gestured toward the man at the window, "that gentleman over there, for all we know, may be a Tory."

Ezra knew perfectly well that the next few moments must precipitate a struggle. In order that Ben might have an opportunity to do his work, the watcher at the window must relax his attention.

The raised voice and the boy's bold insinuation had the effect which he intended. Instantly the man turned from the window, a snarl upon his lips; he approached Ezra menacingly.

"So, my lad, I hear from you again," spoke he, gratingly. "Perhaps if you knew me better, you would not be so ready with your tongue."

Ezra regarded him quietly. That his ruse had succeeded greatly delighted the young patriot; but he concealed his pleasure under a mask of indifference.

"As you suggest," replied he, "if I knew you better, I might hesitate in speaking to you." He was looking the man coolly in the eye; it would take a practiced hand like Ben Cooper's but a moment to strip off a brace of bridles, and he did not now care what action the red-haired man might take. So he proceeded with even greater nonchalance than before:

"And it is also possible that, in the same case, I might go to even greater lengths than I have."

For an instant the man glared at the boy as though dazed by his boldness. Then he leaped toward him in a fury.

But Ezra was prepared for the attack. Like a flash he was upon his feet; the heavy oaken table fell, with a crash of crockery, before the man; unable to stay himself, he went sprawling over it.

Ezra's quick eye had noted the concerted action of the man's friends at the moment of the attack. All had leaped up, their hands fingering the locks of their pistols.

But the boy gave them no time to think after the fall of the table. With a series of soft-footed bounds he reached the window. Placing his hands upon the sill, he vaulted out into the night, and ran toward a group of horses, at no great distance from the door.

"This way," cried Ben Cooper. In another moment the boys were in the saddle and tearing madly away from the "Plow and Harrow."

CHAPTER VI—SHOWS HOW EZRA ADVENTURED TOWARD THE "INDIAN'S HEAD"

As Ezra Prentiss and Ben Cooper dashed away from the "Plow and Harrow," Jason Collyer and his comrades flung themselves with loud cries out of the door. A moment later these cries were redoubled.

"They've found their chargers without bridles," said Ben. "And perhaps more than one of them has got a fall from a twisting saddle. I'm sorry for the landlord; but I'll contrive to pay him later."

They drew rein and sat their horses, looking back toward the inn. The stout landlord was plain in the doorway, and visibly much distressed; hostlers and others appeared with lights; riderless horses were prancing and snorting about with angry men pursuing them.

"How did you come to get out our own nags?" asked Ezra, who had recognized the familiar gait of his tall bay horse at once.

"When that fellow came to the window, I thought I'd not have the chance to do what you suggested," answered Ben. "So I went to the barn, and by good luck found that our mounts had not been unsaddled. When I led them out, taking care to keep in the shadow, I noted the man gone from the window. So I out with my knife and cut the bridles of my friends, gave each girth a slash, and there they were, as neat as you please."

"I think we'd better make the best of our way to Chelmsford," suggested Ezra, after a time spent in watching the dim confusion before the inn. "And it would be better, also, that we keep our pistols ready to hand, for Master Jason Collyer seems a person of some parts."

The road was good and within an hour they had reached Chelmsford, where they had the good fortune to fall in with others upon the same errand as themselves.

"That means," said Ben, as they stretched themselves contentedly between the cool sheets at a cool, clean little inn, a short time after, "that this riding about is over and done. Our section has been covered with the circulars, and we can return to Cambridge."

"And I'm glad of it," yawned Ezra. "There promise to be certain matters of interest before Boston at no distant time, and I, for one, want to see the whole thing."

Next morning Ezra gathered the riders of the Committee of Safety together, and, with their number added to by a half dozen young farmers, they made a descent upon the house of Abdallah.

But they were too late. The place was in ashes; not a sign or trace of any one was to be found.

"I suppose Jason Collyer lost no time in making his report after the affair at the 'Plow and Harrow,'" said Ezra to Ben, after they had left the others and were making their steady way toward Bedford. "And now, I suppose, an alarm will be sent out, and this Mr. Pennington, whoever he may be, will take care not to present himself at the 'Indian's Head' to receive messages of any sort."

From Bedford they took the road to Lexington, and late in the afternoon entered the town of Cambridge. At once they sought out Dr. Warren, as the leading spirit of the Committee of Safety, and made him acquainted with all that had occurred.

The great patriot knit his brows.

"It has a bad look," said he. "The fact that our strength is known and perhaps our every move, is not calculated to give us much satisfaction. But I will see Colonel Prescott in the matter, also Generals Ward and Putnam. And in the meantime," placing a hand upon the boys' shoulders, his kind, grave face alight, "let me tell you that you have both done well. If all who professed the cause did half so well, we would have very little to fear from any source."

Upon the beginning of the enlistment, which commenced after the Lexington fight, both Ezra and Ben had promptly put their names to the roll of Prescott's regiment, as did Ezra's twin brother, George, and Ben's stalwart, ready-handed cousin from the Wyoming wilderness, Nat Brewster. But they had all four been detailed upon special duty for the Committee of Safety, and so lodged at a house at no great distance from Dr. Warren's.

The candles were lighted when Ben and Ezra reached their lodging. George and Nat sat at a table playing at draughts. Both leaped up at the sight of the newcomers.

“Something told us that you would get back this evening,” cried George, as they shook hands all around.

“And we asked Mrs. Parslow, as a special favor, to delay supper,” spoke Nat Brewster.

“That was thoughtful enough, eh, Ben?” laughed Ezra. “And to show how we appreciate it,” to Nat, “we’ll try to do it full justice.”

While Mrs. Parslow, a good-humored, elderly woman, was bringing in the smoking dishes, the four lads related their experiences. George and Nat had ridden together upon the same mission as the other two, but had gone in the direction of Milton and Braintree.

“And the people listened to the Committee’s warnings with their hearts in their eyes,” said Nat Brewster. “Let there be only action, and General Ward will not want for men.”

“But Massachusetts cannot be expected to do it all,” said Ben. “The other colonies must bear their share of the burden.”

“They will, never fear,” said Ezra. “Only this afternoon I heard of a company of riflemen being recruited as far south as Virginia. Then there are the Connecticut men and those from New Hampshire. And don’t forget that these last bring leaders with them. The British themselves acknowledge the ability of Putnam, Stark and Greene.”

Ezra and George sat side by side and Mrs. Parslow looked bewilderedly at them.

“One of you likes griddle-cakes with honey,” she said, “but for the life of me I can’t tell which of you it is.”

“It’s George,” spoke Ben Cooper, with a grin.

“And which is George?” asked the good woman, looking from one to the other.

“Here he is,” responded George, reaching for the much-prized griddle-cakes. “I’ll never fail to acknowledge myself for these, Mrs. Parslow; and I’ve never seen any one that made them like you.”

Mrs. Parslow looked vastly gratified.

“I’m sure I’m glad to please you,” she said. “But how your mother ever told you two apart, I’ll never be able to say.”

The Prentiss brothers had been a puzzle and a delight to her ever since the four came to lodge with her. Nat Brewster, with his grave, competent ways and manly face of character, she had taken to at once; and the chubby face of Ben Cooper, his merry eye and ready laugh, had always pleased her. But the twins were a perpetual bewilderment and mystery to her, as indeed they might be to many with greater observation and sharper eyes than she.

After supper George and Ben got out the draughts, while Ezra and Nat drew their chairs together and discussed the features of the situation as each saw it.

“I heard a long talk between Dr. Warren and Colonel Prescott, only to-day,” said Nat. “I had come to make report of our work and the two were deeply engaged with each other. It would seem that each has a great respect for General Ward, but no large idea of his military ability.”

“It requires, I should say, a man of much power to grasp things and bring them into a state of order,” said Ezra. “The Congress at Philadelphia is, I believe, to name a commander-in-chief for the colonial army; and let us hope that their choice will be one that will bring the best results for the cause.”

“He will have no great soldier to fight in Gage,” spoke Nat, “if the opinions of the experienced Englishman, Charles Lee, and our own General Putnam, have any weight. I have heard it said that Lee has repeatedly declared that Gage is woefully incompetent; and that his every move has been a blunder since the first gun was fired.”

“At any rate,” said Ezra, “he has permitted General Ward to compass him about. He is as tightly boxed up as a tame badger.”

“If it were not that the sea is open to him, we’d starve him out in a very little while. However, King George will see to it that his servants do not go hungry.”

“But it will be salt beef and hardtack that will keep them from it. The colonial lines and earthworks so hedge them in that they’ll never get a scrap of fresh meat or measure of vegetables.”

“But what of our own people who are closed up in the town along with the enemy?” questioned

Nat, gravely. “If the British are in want of palatable things, can we be sure that the townspeople have sufficient food of any sort?”

“You’re right,” said Ezra, thoughtfully. He leaned his head upon his hands and stared at the floor. Nat watched him for some time and then said:

“Your grandfather is not in Cambridge?”

“No,” replied Ezra, “in Boston.”

There was another pause; then Nat spoke:

“But, then, I don’t think you need trouble for him.” He placed a hand on Ezra’s shoulder. “Forgive me for saying it, but your grandfather will not be likely to come to harm.”

“Not from the British, no,” Ezra’s voice was bitter and low. “But from the patriot people of Boston, yes.” He paused a moment and looked into the frank, friendly face of the youth from Wyoming. “You understand how it is with me. And there are many like me. In the war that has just begun, there will be countless families divided like mine has been.”

“Take heart,” said Nat Brewster. “One can hardly expect an old man, and one born on British soil in the bargain, to be other than a friend to the King. There are some who have greater cause for regret than you. They say that the New Hampshire Colonel Stark’s very brother has gone over to the British.”

“It is not altogether my grandfather’s being an enemy to the colonies that troubles me,” said Ezra. “He is a very old man and can do no great harm. But he has made himself hated by the people. And if they are, by any chance, starving in Boston, there will one day come an outbreak; and it is not against the soldiery that vengeance will be directed. It will be against such bitter-spoken partisans as Seth Prentiss.”

Nat nodded.

“That is usually the way,” he said. “Such a thing is greatly to be feared; but in this case it will hardly go so far. I have heard that there is a plan afoot to permit those who so desire to leave Boston. If this is carried out, it will help matters wonderfully.”

But, though Ezra drew some small measure of hope from this suggestion, he was still vaguely troubled. Somehow, the thought of his grandfather kept recurring to him. He seemed filled with an indefinite fear concerning him; it was as though the future held something unpleasant in store. As this state of mind continued, he finally arose and bid his friends good-night with a feeling of great depression. He had entered his room and lighted a candle when he heard a low knock upon the door. Opening it he saw his brother.

George entered and closed the door behind him.

“I have been wanting to say something to you all evening,” said he, “but could not get the opportunity.”

He drummed with his fingers upon the back of a chair, and the other saw a troubled look in his eyes.

“What is it?” asked Ezra.

“It’s about this man Pennington,” replied George. “And also about the one you call Abdallah.”

Ezra regarded him steadily.

“What do you know of them?” he asked.

George, from the time of their father’s death, had made his home with their Tory grandfather. In a measure he had shared the old man’s views. But at the Lexington fight, all this changed, and now he was the stoutest patriot of them all. Ezra had scarcely seen his grandfather in years; for the boy’s open advocacy of the cause of liberty had deeply incensed the old man against him.

“I don’t know a great deal about them,” answered George. “I wish I did. It might save us something. Pennington is a King’s man, of course. He and grandfather have been intimate—I might say, very intimate. I noticed even long ago that they whispered a great deal in corners and held many consultations in the library with the doors carefully closed.”

Ezra pursed up his mouth and frowned.

“I see,” was all he said.

“Pennington came and went a great deal. Sometimes I would not see him for weeks. Then, again, he’d be at the house almost constantly. Now and then he’d bring a stranger. That is how I came to see Abdallah.”

“Ah.”

“They came late one night, in the midst of a storm. There was a great banging of doors and lifting of voices. I had gone to bed some time before; but the noise was so unusual that I got up again, dressed and came down. The library door stood open, and I saw grandfather, Mr. Pennington, Abdallah and General Gage.”

“Did you by any chance hear what was said?”

“Not much. But I learned that grandfather had been expecting Abdallah for months. The man had just arrived that night in a brig from San Domingo. I also drew from what I heard that grandfather desired him to perform some work of great value. But just what its nature was, I did not know until to-night.”

“So grandfather is intimately concerned in the affair,” said Ezra. “Do you know, somehow I felt that some such condition existed. Ben Cooper says he can often feel things coming; and in this case, at any rate, it’s been so with me.”

He paused a moment, then he resumed:

“Grandfather always hated spying and spies. And the fact that he has personally imported this man, shows how great is his hatred of the cause.”

“It has no end,” and George Prentiss shook his head.

“I can’t help the impression that he will come to danger through it all,” said Ezra. “It is a time when men do not stay their hands; and should he risk himself, his life will pay for it.”

Again George shook his head.

“And he is of the sort that risk themselves,” he said.

“But, tell me,” said Ezra. “What sort of a person is Pennington?”

“Not more than thirty-five; but he would strike you as being much older. He is about the average height; and his most noticeable characteristics are a very high and very narrow forehead, and a most disagreeable laugh.”

After George had left him, Ezra undressed and went to bed. But not to sleep! Before his mind came pictures of conspiracies in which his bitter old grandfather played a conspicuous part. In his unreasoning hatred of the colonies’ desire for liberty, the lad knew the old man would go to any length.

“He hasn’t spoken to, or looked at me for years,” thought Ezra. “But I’d have no harm befall him for all that.”

Even after he had gone to sleep the idea clung to him in his dreams. Men with wonderfully high and astonishingly narrow foreheads laughed at him in a disagreeable way; suave, dark-skinned persons in flowing robes sought for the destruction of the colonies in the musty rolls of ancient manuscript. And the dreams were also filled with formidable General Gages, who, sword in hand, urged the others to hasten their tasks.

Next morning Ezra was up before his friends and after breakfasting, mounted and rode away toward the lines.

There were not a great many people to be met with. The outbreak of war had caused great terror, and very many of the inhabitants had left Cambridge, fearful of what was to come. Property was for the most part left unprotected; and as there were many vagabonds hanging upon the skirts of the colonial army, there was more or less looting.

That a general panic did not seize upon the people was due to the great influence and untiring efforts of Dr. Warren. No public character of the time had impressed itself so upon the masses. Even the only partly disciplined troops felt the magnetism of the man, and many times, when they were on the verge of rising against their officers, had a word from him made them see the folly of such an action.

It was with the intention of advising with the doctor that Ezra made such an early start. But early as he was, the patriot had preceded him.

“The doctor has gone to Charlestown,” the serving maid replied to the boy’s inquiries. “Something was amiss there among the soldiers, and he was sent for.”

“I will follow him there,” said Ezra.

“Will nothing do them but that they must be forever disturbing him?” demanded the girl, in an aggrieved sort of way. “He cannot get a sound night’s rest for you all. First it’s one and then it’s the other who comes rushing for him. Are you all children, that you can do nothing for yourselves?”

Leaving the doctor's door, Ezra mounted once more and rode toward Charlestown. Here, after much inquiry, he found the doctor advising with a company of riflemen of Colonel Prescott's command.

There were some British gunboats and a heavily-armed transport anchored in the Charles River, and toward Boston several frowning frigates swung at their cables, black and ominous. Ezra spent some time in watching these, and the distant city where the army of Gage was quartered; and when Dr. Warren was disengaged, he at once approached him with the matter that was nearest his heart.

"I understand you perfectly," said the patriot, after Ezra had related his story. "But I do not see any great occasion for alarm on your part. This spy system, which you so fortunately discovered, will not long survive the exposure. It is the nature of such things to die of too much light."

He paused a moment and then said:

"As to your grandfather's connection with it, now. It is not, in all probability, very great. He has proved himself useful in some way, perhaps, and they have made use of him. I know him fairly well. Seth Prentiss is too quick-tempered and far too outspoken a man to be knowingly selected as an important part in such a plot. And regarding any outbreak in Boston, you may put your mind at rest. Word has been sent to the townspeople to remain quiet, and they will obey."

Dr. Warren talked in the same soothing strain for some time; he saw that the lad was vaguely troubled, and desired to reassure him.

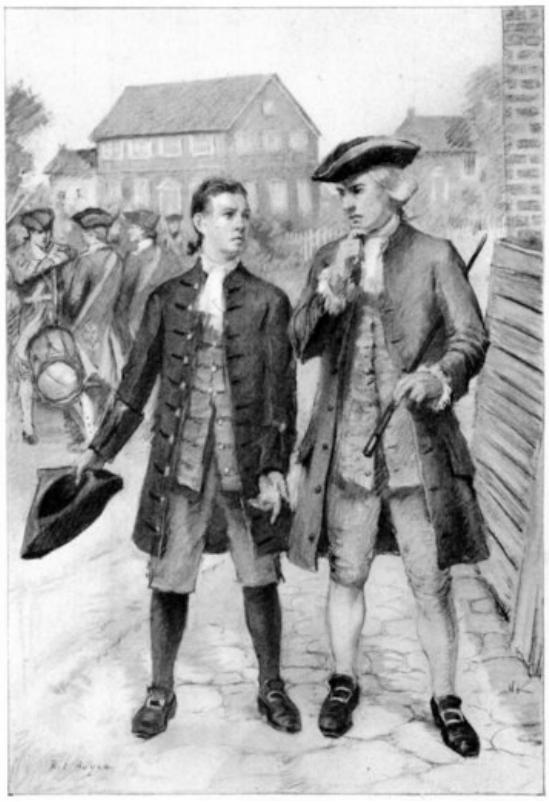
While they were so engaged, Colonel Prescott rode up. His strikingly handsome person was set off by his neat uniform, and he sat his horse like an Arab.

"Ah, Prentiss," cried he, after saluting the doctor cordially, "you are just the sort of lad I've had in mind. There's a dispatch to be carried to Colonel Stark at Medford, and I can scarcely spare an officer."

Ezra saluted promptly.

"Yes, colonel," spoke he.

It took some time to get the dispatch in proper order; and when Ezra finally left Prescott's quarters, it was high noon. After a sharp ride to Medford the papers were delivered to Colonel Stark. Then there was another wait while that fine warrior prepared his answer. Darkness had fallen when he arrived at Charlestown once more.



DR. WARREN TALKED IN THE SAME STRAIN

The bay was rubbed down, rested and fed; its rider stretched himself upon a bench with a biscuit and a slice of beef. The sky had a sort of a bronze hue and the stars burned dimly, like bright rivets set in a giant's shield.

Ezra, when he had finished his supper, lay looking up at this and wondering at the vastness of it. The lights of camp-fires flared here and there; files of rough, un-uniformed soldiers passed and

repassed; bursts of laughter and snatches of song came down from groups whose duty was done.

And across the river, under the same stars, lay the British army; it was perilously near, and it was powerful and deadly if properly guided.

Ezra sat up and looked toward the danger point. Boston was dark, save for a few winking fires; orders had been given long before for civilians to extinguish lights of all descriptions before a given hour. The side lights burned steadily upon the war-ships; occasionally a singsong cry came from their decks as the watches were changed or a seaman called the hour.

Somehow, it seemed to the boy that this was the sort of night that strange, wild things might well go forward. Odd enterprises might be tried and accomplished under that bronze sky and those dimly-burning stars. Strange people might well meet in all sorts of queer places and mysterious deeds might well happen.

In the midst of these reflections, Ezra came to his feet, a sudden resolve fixed in his mind. A little distance away a group of townspeople were gathered. He approached and said to one of them:

“Do you know of an inn anywhere about that is known as the ‘Indian’s Head’?”

The man stared a moment, then shook his head. But one of his companions spoke up.

“There is none in Charlestown; but outside,” and he pointed to the north, “there is a small tavern called by that name. It lies upon a road between Breed’s and Bunker’s Hills.”

“And which do you think would be the best way to reach it?” inquired Ezra.

“What, to-night?” the man glanced about among his companions. And all seemed to reflect his incredulity.

“And why not?”

“Haven’t you heard that the British talk of crossing and setting themselves up upon those two hills?”

“Yes, and of firing upon Charlestown?” put in another.

“They are only wild reports,” answered Ezra. “Such like get abroad in times like these, but there is no reliance to be placed in them.”

If the facts be told, he had heard the same things himself, and from persons of some consequence; but it would not do to encourage the thoughts of the already frightened townspeople in such channels.

“Well,” said the man who professed to know the inn’s location, “if you don’t mind making the venture to such a place, my lad, I’m sure I have nothing more to say.”

His feelings were ruffled at having his warnings made so light of; so without more ado he directed Ezra as to the way to go to reach the inn desired.

“I thank you,” said Ezra.

He went at once to the place where his horse was kept, saddled, bridled and mounted it.

“There may be some risk,” he told himself, as he rode out of the guarded town. “And perhaps I should have asked Ben or Nat or George to go with me. But there is no time for that, if I am to go to-night. And like as not it is a quiet country place, with never a spice of danger in it.”

The way took him along a narrow road bounded by stretches of grazing land. The sheen of the sky showed him the smooth swelling rise of two large hills ahead, the twinkling, far-off stars seemed peering down searching fearfully for dangers among the darkness.

The directions of the man at Charlestown had been unusually good, for after a deal of weaving in and out and the crossing of fields, the boy caught the twinkle of lights from a building ahead. As he came up he found a lantern swinging above the door; and mounted upon a post in the light of this he saw a rough painting of an Indian’s head, which seemed to serve as a sign.

“This is the place, sure enough,” he said.

He at once got down. He had probably not been heard to approach; no one came out to take his horse, so he tied it to a post near the door, slipped his long pistol into the breast of his coat, and coolly entered at the door.

The very first thing that met his eyes were two men seated upon a settle engaged in earnest talk; one had a large, plumed hat beside him on the floor; he wore long soft leather boots and a heavy sword.

“Gilbert Scarlett!” breathed Ezra.

Instantly his eyes went to the person who sat beside the adventurer. Something that Scarlett had said seemed to amuse the other, for just as Ezra turned his attention to him, he uttered a high-pitched, disagreeable laugh.

And then, to make identification doubly sure, the head turned slightly. And Ezra saw that the man's forehead was very narrow and very high.

CHAPTER VII—EZRA MEETS WITH A STRANGE EXPERIENCE

The two were so engrossed in their conversation that they paid not the slightest heed to the newcomer. The landlord, a thick-set, sodden-looking man with a churlish expression, however, came forward.

"Well, young gentleman?" he inquired, and he looked searchingly at Ezra out of his small eyes.

"I'd like my horse looked after," said the lad. "And then I'd be thankful for a little something for myself, if it's no great trouble."

The man shook his head surlily.

"If you want your horse attended to, you'll have to do it yourself," spoke he. "I have no one here to do such work. Hostlers are afraid to stay."

"Very well," replied Ezra, as he seated himself. "I'll look to him presently."

He had selected a far corner where Scarlett, if he turned, could not readily make him out.

"Cooks are just as hard to keep," stated the host grumblingly. "So if you expect much in the way of supper, you'll be disappointed."

"Whatever you have," said Ezra, pleasantly. "A dish of cold meat, the end of a loaf and some mead, if I'm not asking too much."

The man grunted.

"That's a common failing hereabouts these times," he said, preparing to go about his duties. "They all ask too much. Every one of them does." Then with a sudden viciousness, "But they'd better stay away with their questions! I'll not have them! Not a bit of it!"

With that he snorted his angry way into the kitchen, leaving his young guest with a quiet smile upon his face.

"It is very evident," mused Ezra, "that the spies of General Ward have been here before me." His eyes went to Scarlett's companion, and his thoughts continued. "That being the case, Master Pennington is a man of some courage to risk showing himself, I should think."

The conversation between the two was really a monologue. Scarlett talked in a resonant voice, twirled his moustache and gestured elaborately. The other listened, shrugged at times, at others smiled, at others again uttered the high-pitched, disagreeable laugh. Ezra leaned back and clasped a knee with his hands and listened with interest.

"The man was an uncommon sort of man," said Scarlett, "small, backward in his manner and very low spoken. When he offered me the work to do I felt sure that it was some plagued commercial matter that a man of my quality should have nothing to do with. But I needed money and he had it to pay. So I undertook to carry his papers without more ado."

"And you found the matter of more interest than you'd have supposed?" questioned the other.

"Decidedly," answered Scarlett. He pulled up his boot-top and stroked his chin. "First I lost my way; then I lost my horse. And afterward, as though these were not enough, I all but lost my life by means of a young blade pistoling me upon the road; him I sent on with the message. Afterward I met with some riders and a wagon heavily laden. Among the riders was the man Abdallah whom I had been sent to see. I knew him at once, for no other man in this region could have such an appearance."

A look of interest came into the other's face.

"And he directed you here?"

"He said that I might by chance come upon some further employment," answered Scarlett, "if I frequented this place. He was not pleased with the way I had performed my first office; but, doubtless, he's a person of some perception and knows a man of mettle when he sees one."

"No doubt," said Pennington, dryly.

He regarded the adventurer with attention and seemed endeavoring to properly weigh him. There was a bold, free air about Gilbert Scarlett that took the eye at once; but that he was

wondrously boastful was evident, and boastful strangers are ever looked upon with distrust.

“A man,” declaimed Scarlett, twirling at his moustache, “cannot go through seven campaigns and not bear some stamp of his service. When I first offered my sword to the Elector of Hanover, he told me in his rough German way that I was but a boy. But later I proved to him that I could do the work of my elders, even then.”

“Abdallah said nothing specific, I suppose?” inquired Pennington.

“How specific?”

“He gave you no token to present to any one by name?”

“None.”

“And he did not say that he would employ you?”

“Not in so many words.”

Pennington shook his head.

“I do not know the man,” said he. “But from what you have told me, it would seem that he has been making game of you.”

The head of Scarlett went up, and his hand sought the heavy hilt of his sword.

“There have been one or two, at odd times, who have sought to do that,” spoke he, and there was a ring in his voice that boded no good to any such. “And I’ll warrant you that they never attempted it again.”

“Have you inquired of the landlord as to these persons whom you seek?” asked Pennington.

“I have,” with a shrug. “But he is a surly, short-spoken dog. I can get nothing out of him.”

“It pains me to be unable to give you any intelligence of them,” said Pennington. “But I am a stranger here myself.”

As he spoke these words he turned his head, perhaps to look for the landlord. His eyes fell upon Ezra seated there so coolly, and a look of astonishment came into his face. But instantly he showed what a cautious man he was by lifting his hand to hide his face; then he coughed affectedly.

Almost simultaneously with this gesture, Ezra noticed Scarlett make a sharp movement. It was as though the adventurer was also about to turn. But apparently he thought better of it, and remained with his back stoically presented.

“He saw the change in Pennington’s face,” was Ezra’s instant thought.

But what had caused this change the boy could not imagine.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “it was but the sudden discovery that there is a third person in the room—a person who might have overheard something to the disadvantage of Abdallah and his fellows.”

There was a marked pause; the backs of both men were turned to Ezra; to his searching gaze it was plain that they were casting about as to what they should do or say. It was Gilbert Scarlett who broke the silence.

“Of course,” said he, “a gentleman of my fortune—or lack of it—has no choice but to gain the wages that enable him to live. I somehow fancied the service of this Abdallah. Perhaps its strangeness appealed to me. But now that he has failed me, I can see nothing to do but to take service with the colonial army.”

“From your tone,” spoke Pennington, “I gather that you do not care to do this.” He laughed his disagreeable laugh and resumed, “They have the right upon their side, you must admit that. And then they are led by very virtuous statesmen.”

“They are right enough,” said Scarlett, with a shrug. “But is their treasury deep enough to pay a needy officer with reasonable regularity? I fancy not. As to their statesmen, I grant you their ability, knowing nothing of them good or bad; but it takes generals to win battles.”

As he spoke he threw one arm across the back of the settle, and in the most careless way in the world, turned his head. When he saw Ezra he first looked surprised, and then amused.

“What,” said he, jovially, “my young friend of the pistol! Well met!”

He arose. The spurs upon the heels of his boots clinked upon the tiled floor, his long sword trailed noisily at his side. Ezra, perfectly self-possessed, arose to greet him. Scarlett clasped his hand warmly.

“Chance,” declared the adventurer, “plays us many queer pranks as we journey through life.” He looked from Ezra to Pennington, a mocking smile upon his lips, then he continued: “For I suppose it was the very blindest chance that brought you here.”

Every inflection of the speaker’s voice and his whole attitude, however, indicated his complete disbelief in anything of the sort. It was plain to the boy that the soldier of fortune was convinced that he and Pennington were there by prearrangement. But Ezra did not speak; Pennington, his face a shade paler, sat watchfully observant.

Scarlett continued to glance from one to the other of them with amused toleration. It was as though he had detected them in a sort of child’s play by which they had hoped to hoodwink him.

“Sit you down,” he finally invited Ezra. “But over here,” pushing out a chair, “where we can see you more readily.”

Ezra sat down, and Scarlett waved his hand toward Pennington, the smile still curling his moustache.

“I do not know either of your names,” he said, “but,” to Ezra, “here is a gentleman whom you are unacquainted with, of course,” and he burst into a laugh, “but whom I could have diverted vastly had I chosen to tell him of our little misadventure upon the road, two nights ago.”

Surprise and incredulity came into the face of Pennington; but he strove to hide his agitation from the watchful eyes of the adventurer.

“Is it possible,” he ejaculated, “that this is the lad with the pistol—he,” eagerly, “whom you sent on with the message?”

“None other,” said Scarlett, smiling, “and since you are unacquainted, I take pleasure in making you known to each other.”

One of Pennington’s hands passed over his face; it was trembling, and, like his countenance, was pale. He spoke hastily to Ezra, trying hard to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

“You must have had a most extraordinary experience,” remarked he. “And did you succeed in delivering this message at the house of this gentleman—ah,” as though trying to recall the name, then giving up the attempt, “the gentleman with the foreign name?”

“I did,” replied Ezra. “And I trust that Master Scarlett bears me no ill-will because of the manner in which I became his messenger.”

“Not the least in life,” said Scarlett. “It is a man’s right to defend himself against all comers on the road. But you conducted the mission with which I entrusted you oddly. You set these people, whoever they are, by the ears. From what I learned in a short talk with them, you deceived them in sundry ways; and it ended in their house being burned down and they,” with a laugh, “becoming wanderers upon the face of the earth.”

“I delivered the papers as I promised,” said Ezra. “I told the people at the house nothing, but they took much for granted. What resulted was much their own fault.”

Pennington had listened with interest.

“Were you by any chance entrusted with a message in reply to the one you carried?” he asked with eagerness.

“I was,” returned the boy frankly.

“And to whom were you to deliver it?” asked Scarlett. “And where?”

“To a Mr. Pennington,” replied Ezra, evenly. “And at this inn.”

“So!” Scarlett lay back in the settle, his arms folded upon his chest and his booted legs stretched out straight before him. “And how were you to know this gentleman?”

“I was to inquire of the landlord.”

Impulsively Scarlett rose up.

“I will save you the trouble,” said he. “The matter, in a measure, is my own,” apologetically to Ezra, “so I trust you will pardon me.” He lifted his voice and called: “Landlord!”

There came a grumbling, unintelligible answer from the kitchen; but the host did not present himself.

“I took him to be a surly, sour-mouthed villain from the first,” commented Scarlett. “And as he will not come to me, I will go to him. And I’ll warrant you he’ll tell what I want to know, or I’ll have him dance you a measure that he’ll not like.”

So with a hitch at his sword belt and a twirl at his moustache, the speaker clanked into the

kitchen, from which his voice came a moment later with commanding insistence.

And no sooner had he vanished than Pennington bent eagerly toward Ezra.

“You know me, of course?” said he.

As Ezra did not reply, the man continued in a low, rapid tone:

“You saw me frequently at your grandfather’s house at Boston.”

A thrill ran through Ezra. He now understood that first surprised look. The man mistook him for his twin brother, George. But the boy shook his head as though in doubt.

“I have no recollection of you,” he answered.

The man regarded him searchingly.

“Your name is Prentiss?”

“It is.”

“You are the grandson of Seth Prentiss?”

“I am.”

The man evidenced his satisfaction.

“You are he whom I took you to be,” he said. He studied the lad carefully for a moment. “Upon second thought I do not wonder that you fail to recall me,” continued he. “If I remember rightly, I have always been somewhat given to hesitancy in my manner of showing myself.” Here he laughed his disagreeable laugh. “A man in my particular profession must not be too forward.”

“And what is your profession?” asked Ezra.

“I am the confidential agent of—of others,” replied the man. “In point of fact I am the very man you came here to see.”

“Not Mr. Pennington!”

“That is my name,” returned the man. “And now,” with a quick look toward the kitchen, where, judging by the sounds that came from it, a very stormy interview was taking place, “give me the message sent by Abdallah. I have been trying to get into communication with him, but could not do so. I had no notion of what had happened until I heard some fragments of the story from this loud-mouthed soldier.”

The landlord’s voice now came from the kitchen in loud denial.

“I tell you, sir, I know nothing of the gentleman you ask for.”

“And I tell you that you do. Don’t think to pull the wool over my eyes. Give me full information of this Master Pennington, or I’ll spit you on this skewer and toast you over your own fire.”

“I do not pretend to understand anything that has happened,” said Pennington to Ezra, swiftly and very low. “You’ll have your own good time to explain all that. But,” with a fearful glance at the kitchen door, “the matter of the dispatch which Abdallah gave you is perhaps urgent. And all the more so from being delayed.”

The uproar in the kitchen, if such a thing were possible, grew louder. But Ezra paid no heed to it.

“It is impossible for me to turn the paper over to you now,” he answered quietly.

The man stared at him.

“And why?” he asked.

“Because I no longer have it.”

“What!” Pennington sprang up, his high, narrow forehead flushing. “Then who has?”

“I think,” said the boy, “that it is in the hands of one who will make good use of it.”

Consternation was written deeply in the face of Master Pennington; he had raised a clenched hand, an exclamation trembled upon his lips when the landlord rushed into the room amid a great clatter of pans and kettles. He was pale of face and affrighted of manner; and close at his heels, with his drawn sword in his hand, strode the adventurer, Gilbert Scarlett.

CHAPTER VIII—EZRA MAKES UP HIS MIND TO A DANGEROUS VENTURE

The surly landlord of the “Indian’s Head” danced into the centre of his public room, the expression of fear expanding upon his face.

“Gentlemen,” he cried, appealing to Ezra and Pennington, “I demand your protection. I am beset by this man, who would kill me in my own house.”

“If you prefer to have it so,” spoke Scarlett with a swishing whir of his heavy blade, “I will dispatch you upon the lawn if you are possessed of one, or, in default of that, in the public road. I am of a liberal nature, and would as well please you as not in the place of your taking off.”

His agile point followed the churlish landlord in his caperings.

“Sir,” cried the man, addressing himself to Pennington, “I crave you to speak a word to this mad villain, who seems bound to spill my blood.”

Pennington arose and was about to remonstrate with the young soldier; but the latter stopped before he had well begun.

“Have the goodness to keep your place,” requested Scarlett, with a quick, fierce, unmistakable look. “There are some things, perhaps, that I can be crossed in,” here the look grew significant, “and made to appear cheap. But be assured, sir, that this is not one of them.”

At once Pennington sank back upon the settle and again the landlord resumed his capering before the swift-moving sword point.

“Now, rascal,” cried Scarlett, harshly, “will you do as I ask? Faith, I’m playing you easily enough; in Muscovy they’d have had your life for half this show of stubbornness.”

“I tell you I know no such gentleman,” cried the landlord. “How can I tell that which I know not?”

He whirled away before the brisk flash of the blade; and at the same time he continued, addressing Pennington, meaningly:

“I beg of you, sir, for the last time, to persuade this man to let be. I am but flesh and blood. I cannot withstand everything.”

Again Pennington seemed about to interfere; but once more the fierce glance of Scarlett awed him. Then the latter shortened his weapon and glowered at the innkeeper.

“And I call upon you for the last time to tell me who this man Pennington is!” he grated. “Quick now!”

The landlord’s eyes sought for a means of escape; but he was hard pressed to make use of any that presented themselves.

“I will tell,” he at length cried, desperately. “The man you want is there.”

His trembling finger indicated Pennington, who turned a shade paler, but sat composedly enough. Scarlett’s sword point fell; he turned upon Pennington and saluted him in a formal, military fashion, a satirical smile curling his moustache points upward.

“Sir,” said he, “I am most pleased. I will not say that I expected as much, but I can say that I am not at all surprised.”

Ezra watched the spy curiously. He saw him swallow once or twice in an effort to speak. But finally he managed to resume control of his tongue.

“You have found me out, then,” said he, and he smiled in a sickly fashion. “I was interested to see just how long it would take you.”

For all his speech faltered, his eyes were steady enough to threaten the innkeeper for betraying him. But the man returned the look defiantly.

“I’ll not be sworded to death, and you sitting by at your ease, never lifting a hand,” he declared sullenly.

Scarlett turned quickly upon the man.

“You have done your share to the furthering of the acquaintance of this gentleman and myself, and I am obliged to you. So now, back to your scullery and let us hear none of your protestations.”

The innkeeper went quickly enough; he had had a taste of the adventurer’s quality, and clearly desired no more of it. After he had vanished into his kitchen, Scarlett sheathed his blade, struck an attitude with his feet very wide apart and hooked his thumbs into his sword belt.

“So, so, good and excellent sirs,” said he with a lifting of his heavy brows. “It would seem that you have been making a laughing-stock of me.”

“Nothing was further from my intention,” Pennington hastened to say.

Disbelief was plain in Scarlett’s face; he turned to Ezra saying:

“And what answer has your intimate?”

“None, other than that I am not his intimate. To the best of my knowledge,” proceeded Ezra, “I have never met with this gentleman before to-night.”

Gilbert Scarlett shot him a mingled glance of astonishment and regret.

“I was mistaken in you, then,” spoke he. “I took you to be an upstanding youth of much character and straightforwardness.”

Ezra was about to speak in answer to this, but the young soldier waved his hand.

“Let me have no denials. I have eyes,” and he gestured angrily. “Also, I have perception, though you both seem to doubt it.”

“Sir,” spoke Pennington, in a soothing tone, “you much deceive yourself if you fancy that we have in any way sought to mislead you.”

He leaned forward upon the settle, his legs crossed and his hands upon his knees.

“Now,” he proceeded, “I leave it to you as a gentleman of wide experience and much service, to pass judgment upon what I am about to say.”

The adventurer unhooked his thumbs from his sword belt and twirled his moustache. He said nothing in reply; but there was a sardonic look in his face.

“I,” and Pennington tapped his chest, “am the person whom your young friend here,” with a nod toward Ezra, “was to inquire for. I acknowledge it.”

“It’s overlate for frankness,” said Gilbert Scarlett, grimly. “But, go on.”

“I am able to say in perfect good faith,” went on Pennington, “that I had no expectation of seeing him. Neither had I any notion that he knew anything of the affairs of Abdallah. As for my failure to acknowledge a connection with the story which you told me a while ago, you surely can feel no resentment for that. When a man is engaged in”—he paused and shrugged his shoulders—“well, in work of a more or less secret character, it is not quite safe for him to speak freely with strangers.”

The adventurer unbent his brows and his face altered in expression.

“Now,” said he, “that is talk that holds much sense. It is clear to me that you could not do other than you did.”

Then he turned to Ezra once more.

“Chance and circumstance seem to have taken you for their very own,” said he.

“Some things have befallen me of late days that make your saying seem like the truth,” said Ezra. “But my experience must be but a trifle, as compared with what yours must have been, sir. I have no doubt but that chance has figured much in your life.”

“Why,” answered the adventurer, “now that you mention it, it is true enough. What great matter is it for a lad to chance along a lonely wagonway near to sundown, and meet with a horseman who has had an accident befall him? And that you should chance to have the pleasure of this gentleman’s acquaintance,” indicating Pennington, “is, upon second thought, not a matter to marvel at. Why, I recall, how, when I served the Turk at Cairo, I met with an adventure that must have seemed like a miracle of chance. Moslems are a strange people, but they grow stranger still in their dealings with a Christian; and when that Christian happens to be in command of a squadron of them——”

But he stopped upon the very verge of the adventure. Pulling up a chair, he seated himself in it and addressing Ezra, said:

“But let us come to this message which Abdallah gave you. As you came here seeking Master Pennington, which I have no doubt you did, I suppose you brought the writing with you.”

During all which followed Scarlett’s entrance with the innkeeper, Pennington’s sharp glance kept shifting itself to Ezra. Now he spoke, eagerly:

“In that you bring us to a matter of consequence, sir. During your absence, we held some converse upon this very matter. And our young friend informed me that the dispatch is no longer in his possession.”

Scarlett folded his arms across his chest in an easy sort of way, and replied, lightly:

“I have no real knowledge of this affair, one way or the other, sir. But from your manner, I take it that this circumstance is irritating.”

“It is more than that,” spoke Pennington. “It may be fatal. General Gage was expecting——”

But here he checked himself after the manner of a cautious man who has caught himself in the midst of a dangerous admission.

Ezra, however, smiled.

“It is somewhat late,” said he, “to try and conceal the dispatch’s ultimate destination. Major Buckstone saw to my enlightenment at the very start.”

Pennington’s hands clenched.

“You saw him then! The old idiot! He would discuss our plans with the colonial council of war itself.”

“I have not the good fortune of this gentleman’s acquaintance,” spoke Scarlett, “but I think I know the type. The bluff old officer—honest as the sun—who knows nothing but his routine and the well ordering of his command. But,” with a careless wave of the hand, “what matters it? We are all friends, are we not? We are all fairly well gifted with understanding. So a trifle of plain talk will do no harm.”

Pennington pondered and nodded reluctantly.

“In a way,” said he, “you are right.”

“A frank question or two, when needed, will have no bad result,” said the adventurer. “And I think if they were applied here and now, we’d come at something of profit, perhaps.”

Pennington’s face flushed.

“I am beholden to you, sir,” said he, a trifle bitterly. Then turning to Ezra he said: “Perhaps you will now tell us how you came to so part with the papers entrusted to you?”

“Is it any great wonder,” said Ezra, “that I did not safeguard a message given me by people who later sought my life?”

He was determined to be as evasive as possible. If he hoped to come to the true depth and breadth of this spy system, he knew that he must meet craft with craft.

Pennington made no reply to this, but continued to sit and watch. The situation must have puzzled him; clearly he did not understand it.

But Scarlett was ready enough.

“For my part, I blame you but little,” he said. “It was but a churlish way to treat a messenger.”

There was a short pause; then the spy spoke.

“Might I ask,” he inquired, “who this mysterious person is to whom you confided this paper?”

Ezra shook his head and remained silent.

“As a grandson of Seth Prentiss,” continued Pennington, “I am loth to believe you other than a friend to honesty and good government.”

“And in that,” returned the boy, “you would be right.”

Scarlett here leaned forward.

“And was the gentleman to whom you entrusted the paper,” asked he, “of a like inclination?”

“He was.”

“Why, in that case,” and the soldier of fortune laughed good-humoredly, “I don’t think it any great matter. Let us but get word to the gentleman and he’ll take it to Boston himself, perhaps.”

Pennington’s eyes searched Ezra’s face, and the boy replied:

“Perhaps so; I have heard him say that he meant to make his way into Boston before long.”

The hidden meaning of this must have left its trace in Ezra’s voice, for Pennington’s gaze, if it were possible, grew keener.

“That may, perhaps, serve,” said the man. Then he continued: “It so chances that I am left in a most peculiar position by your unexpected connection with this affair, Master Prentiss.” There was concern in his voice as he went on. “It will be difficult for me to explain it to those to whom I

must make explanation. And it will be equally difficult for them to understand."

A thrill ran through Ezra. As plainly as day he read the purpose of the man in his crafty eyes. And, so it flashed upon him, as that purpose would help him in his own, he at once fell in with it.

"If I could but make my own explanation," he said, "it would greatly lighten your labor."

The eyes of the spy snapped.

"To do that you must needs go into Boston," he said. "Would you venture that?"

"I have been there before," answered the boy. "And why not again? And I think this gentleman," nodding smilingly at Scarlett, "would also make the venture if it could be accomplished."

"As well as not," said the soldier of fortune, carelessly. "One place is much like another to me."

There was triumph in Pennington's face as he arose.

"Excellent!" he cried. "Both of you shall cross the river to-night. I have the means at hand. And I will present you to those," here the high-pitched, disagreeable laugh rang out, "who will be delighted to welcome you."

CHAPTER IX—IN WHICH EZRA FARES INTO THE CITY OF THE ENEMY, AND HEARS THE VOICE OF AN ACQUAINTANCE

It was very evident to Ezra Prentiss that the purpose of Pennington was to entrap him. Once safe in Boston, so the spy's thoughts ran, he and his friends could put upon the boy whatever pressure it pleased them; there the latter would not be so indefinite in his statements as he was at the "Indian's Head."

"If you have a way of crossing, it must be a most secret one," said Gilbert Scarlett, who, like the others, was preparing to depart. "Only this morning I made the rounds, or as much of them as I was permitted to make, and I found the shore very well guarded."

"They make a great display of activity and alertness," said Pennington, with disdain. "But the river is open for any one who cares to cross it."

Here Pennington stepped into the kitchen and exchanged a few rapid words with the innkeeper. Scarlett pursed his lips and regarded Ezra with attention.

"It would seem to me that under proper conditions, he would prove a very thorough-going gentleman," remarked he, with a nod toward the door.

"I have no doubt of it," said the boy.

Scarlett continued to look at him; and there was speculation in his eyes. At length he spoke again.

"You baffle me sometimes. By your looks you should be a plain dealer, if one is to place an atom of trust in the reading of faces. And yet I find you writhing about like an eel upon a brick pavement."

"What I have said," returned Ezra, "is the truth."

"Ay, what you have said!" The other laughed and slapped his chest. "It's what you have not said that takes me by the horns. And," with a jerk of the thumb over his shoulder, "our acquaintance there is bothered by it too." The speaker studied Ezra for a moment. "Has it occurred to you that you may have fallen in with his desires very neatly in offering to cross the river?"

Ezra smiled and nodded. At this Gilbert Scarlett laughed and slapped him upon the back.

"I might have known it," said he. "You are a deep one for a lad."

"Only a few nights ago you had a rather poor opinion of my wit," said Ezra.

"I remember the saying and I recall it," spoke Scarlett. "I took you for a country lad, in sympathy with the colonists; and I thought it quite a jest to have you carry a message which I felt sure was calculated to help your countrymen but little. But," with a gesture, "I have changed my mind with regard to you. I no longer know what to think. But this I do know," with great candor, "I like you; and I'll stand your friend, if you need a friend, at any place and at any time."

Before the boy had an opportunity to express his thanks, Pennington emerged from the kitchen. Buttoning up his coat, he said:

"You'll have to leave your horses in care of the landlord, gentlemen. The patrols and detachments that hold the roads would be sure to see us if we went mounted."

Gilbert Scarlett did not like this.

“Without a horse,” declared he, “I am like a fish without water to swim in. But, if we must, we must, and that’s all there is to it.”

Without, it was dark and silent. The bronze sky of the early evening had given place to one entirely black. But the stars winked curiously down, and their rays relieved the darkness to a great extent.

“It will behoove us to mind our steps,” said Pennington, as they made their way along the road by which Ezra had approached the “Indian’s Head.” “Daylight shows many ditches and sunken fences in this hollow, and it would scarcely benefit our peace of mind or body to come upon one or the other.”

“’Twas a good thought to create the stars,” mused the soldier of fortune, aloud, after they had gone some distance. “They relieve the moon of duty when she is weary. If it were not for them and their twinkling, the night would be as black as my hat.”

“Queer things are done on dark nights,” said the spy, and he laughed in his disagreeable way.

Scarlett nudged Ezra in the darkness. Then he made reply:

“I can well believe that. And the saying brings to mind a little experience that I once had in Moscow while I served my short career with the Czar. My regiment had but returned from the frontier, after several onfalls at Tartar towns; and I and several of my comrades were drinking our glasses of tea in a booth. It was a very dark night and we talked over the times just passed, and were hoping good fortune for those to come, when there entered a ——”

A shrill whistle sounded and Scarlett’s anecdote was nipped suddenly.

“Be silent,” said Pennington in a whisper. He drew them to the side of the road, where all three halted and crouched, watchfully. The steady tramp of men was heard in the darkness; then some indistinct forms began to wave uncertainly on their vision; finally a voice was heard saying:

“No, I was not sure. But it sounded much like some one speaking.”

“It may have come from a great distance off. Sounds travel far at night, you know.”

“Yes; but this seemed fairly close. And it is hereabouts that we were warned that the British might venture seeking information, so we can’t be too careful.”

The tramp of the men continued along the road. At length they were swallowed up; and both their voices and footsteps died away.

“A patrol,” said Pennington. “And it’s the first time that I’ve seen one so far away from the shore. It seems that we must be extra careful to-night.”

They remained as they were for a time, then, under the guidance of the spy, they left the road, mounted a fence and entered the fields. From then on it was very rough traveling; but Pennington, who had most probably been over the ground often before, selected the least broken ways, in spite of the darkness. After what seemed a very long time indeed, they mounted to the top of Breed’s Hill; and off before them they now made out the lights of the British gun vessels swinging in the stream.

Cautiously they descended to the water’s edge. Here and there, some distance back, there was a watch-fire, about which were gathered a small group of hardy colonists; but Pennington had studied the situation well; for that point of the shore upon which they stood was apparently unguarded.

The spy waited in silence for a time; then he uttered a low, mournful cry like that of a night-bird haunting the water’s edge. There was a brief pause; then the sound was repeated from the river.

“It is a most excellent thing,” observed Pennington, “to have an aide who can be depended upon at all times.”

“That remark,” said Scarlett, “is almost exactly similar to one that I once heard from the old Elector of Hanover. He said——”

“Sh-h-h!” warned Pennington. “Not so loud.”

Scarlett at once ceased speaking. Again they stood in silence; then the faint dip of oars reached them. A little later a low voice asked inquiringly:

“For whom?”

“For King George,” replied Pennington promptly. Then the low-pitched voice resumed:

“Is that you, Mr. Pennington?”

“Yes, with some friends.”

The spy, followed by Scarlett and Ezra, climbed into the skiff; it was manned by four sailor-like men, who at once pushed off.

Not a word was spoken after they had once started; carefully the sweeps were dipped, slowly they were pulled; the skiff progressed steadily and with scarcely a ripple of the water.

Gradually the lights of a vessel grew nearer. There was a rattling and clinking of metal from her low-lying deck; then a hoarse voice, startlingly loud after all their caution, hailed them.

“Ahoy!” cried the voice. “Belay there, and give an account of yourself.”

“Is that the ‘Scorpion’?” asked Pennington.

“It is. For whom?”

“For King George.”

“Come alongside and let’s have a look at you.”

The skiff approached the gun vessel; as its bow scraped the side a man leaned over the rail with a ship’s lantern.

“Ay, ay,” he said in a tone of recognition. “So it’s you, once more, is it, Pennington?”

“Once more, Mr. Halsey,” returned the spy.

“Quite a boatload, I see,” and the man flashed his lantern aloft.

“Yes, some gentlemen who wish to enter the town.”

“It’s the only place for honest men,” grumbled the sailor. “But I must say there is a great shortage of fresh provision there. My men will all be down with the scurvy if they don’t get a change soon.”

The seaman was still speaking when the skiff pulled out of hearing. Three times they were halted before they reached a point on the Boston side just above Gree’s shipyard. A heavy battery was planted here that commanded Charlestown, and they were brought under this in charge of a yawl filled with men and in command of a young officer of marines, who showed dapper and spick and span under the lantern light.

When they were landed, a file of men took them in charge until Pennington, after some whispered conversation, was passed by the officer in charge.

“A right soldierly way of looking at the matter,” observed Scarlett, who had been keenly watching all that occurred.

“General Gage is a most excellent soldier,” spoke Pennington. “None of the rebel troops shall get in while he is in command, nor,” and there was a sneer in his tone, “none of his own troops shall get out.”

As they passed through Prince’s Street they heard the steady tramp of troops on their way to the southerly part of the city. When beyond the Mill Pond, a roar of hoofs met them as squadron after squadron of cavalry dashed by headed in the same direction. At Middle Street they encountered a battery of field-guns also hastening southward.

“Something is toward, to-night,” said Scarlett with great interest.

“It may be that they are on their way to the Neck,” was Ezra’s thought. And a shiver ran through him as he fancied the colonists not being ready to meet the attack.

When they passed the gardens they came to Sun Court; and as they paused before a stately mansion, Ezra said:

“But why here? Surely my grandfather has nothing to do with this business.”

Pennington laughed.

“Don’t be too sure of that. He is a man much desirous of the government’s advancement, and he does not hesitate to use whatever means he can to serve that purpose.”

The speaker ascended the steps and gave a sharp rat-tat-tat upon the heavy knocker; then he turned and looked down at the boy, who remained upon the brick walk.

“Another thing,” said he. “You will find him a man not easily satisfied.”

“I know that,” replied Ezra.

“Your explanation as to how you came to part with Abdallah’s dispatch will have to be very much more complete than the one you gave me,” said Pennington, rubbing his hands together in a satisfied way. “He will not tolerate evasion of any sort, especially in the presence of those whom he is entertaining to-night.”

“He has guests, then?” said the boy.

Before Pennington could reply, the door opened. A grave servant stepped aside in the brightly-lighted hallway, and they entered. And as the door closed behind them, from a room to the left of a hall came a great voice roaring:

“I tell you, General Gage, I did all that a soldier and a gentleman could well do. If the messenger proved a knave and a traitor, the blame is not to be laid at my door.”

Pennington’s hand fell lightly upon Ezra’s shoulder, and he said sneeringly in the boy’s ear:

“Here is good fortune. I knew of Gage, but I did not even dream of your acquaintance Major Buckstone being here.”

CHAPTER X—TELLS HOW ILL NEWS CAME TO GENERAL GAGE

For a moment, after hearing the thunderous voice of Major Buckstone, Ezra Prentiss was startled. But an instant’s reflection showed him that the major’s presence could make no difference to him or his plans.

“He knows nothing of me that is not already known,” the lad told himself.

The grave-faced man servant who had admitted them now spoke, in a low-voiced aside, to Ezra.

“I am glad to see you back, sir. We’ve had all sorts of fears for you. The master thought you might have been killed, even.”

Ezra smiled.

“But you see that I am not,” said he, understanding at once that he was again mistaken for George.

“Yes, sir.” The man looked at him in a fidgety sort of way. He seemed to dread something. “The master, sir,” he recommenced, “is—is—you’ll pardon me, sir—in a bad temper to-night. Shall I announce you?”

But here Pennington intruded himself.

“If I may be so pushing,” said he to Ezra, “I will take that upon myself. There are some trifles that had perhaps better be gone over before he sees you.”

Ezra caught Scarlett’s warning look, but paid no attention. He knew full well that it was the spy’s intention to be forehanded with him; he realized that the man desired to place the case before the gathering in his grandfather’s house in as evil a light as possible.

But he was careless in the matter; he felt that it made no difference what Pennington said. He was in Boston; he was in a fair way, perhaps, of discovering much that would be of help to the cause of liberty. How he was to escape, finally, was a matter for the future. The present was to be spent in garnering facts; the future must take care of itself.

“Very well,” said Ezra, readily enough. “Do you speak to him and prepare him.”

Pennington followed the serving man up the wide hall; some hangings were drawn back and both disappeared.

“More and more strange do you grow to me,” said Scarlett, as he seated himself in a cushioned chair. “I thought you wise enough to know that a first voice in a cause is usually the winning one.”

“When one has little interest in a thing,” returned Ezra, “it matters little who wins. My purpose here is not to see who makes the best impression on my grandfather and his friends.”

Scarlett said nothing to this, but merely shook his head and began to look about him.

The hall was a lofty one with a polished floor and a broad balustraded staircase. Paintings hung upon the walls and rich Eastern hangings screened the doorways. There was a massiveness about everything that indicated opulence in the owner.

“Your grandfather,” said the soldier, “is evidently a person of some consequence.”

“He is engaged in the West Indian trade,” answered Ezra, “and is accounted a very rich man.”

“I see.” The soldier of fortune twisted one end of his moustache. “This war, however, will put a check to his money-making for a time, I think.”

“It has all but ruined the trade of them all. And I wonder how much,” speculated the boy, “that has to do with the British leaning of most of the merchants.”

“A great deal, you may depend,” chuckled Gilbert Scarlett. “Touch a trader’s purse and you touch him upon a most delicate part. Not,” hastily, “that I mean to cast any discredit upon your relative. I speak of merchants in the bulk.”

“It is not for me to defend my grandfather,” said Ezra with a smile, “even if you did select him from them all.” For there came a confused hubbub of voices, above which was one high, harsh and threatening. “As you shall see in a moment, he is in every way competent to take care of himself.”

Even as he spoke the hangings over the far doorway were flung aside and a tall, grim-faced old man, with thin white hair and of gaunt, powerful frame, stepped into the hall. With head erect and frowning brows he came down the hall; his eyes were hard with anger.

“So,” said he, and Scarlett at once learned that he was the owner of the harsh voice, “you have seen fit to show yourself at last, I see.”

Ezra bowed respectfully.

“As things are, sir,” said he, quietly, “it would have puzzled me to make my way into Boston any sooner.”

A burning hatred flashed in Seth Prentiss’ eyes. One hand gestured his fury, the other was pointed at his grandson.

“Are you mocking me?” he asked in a voice made low by the storm of feeling that seemed to possess him. “Are you deriding us all because we are pent up here, like rats, and never a blow struck by the King’s troops to set the matter right!”

“As you should know, sir,” said Ezra, in the same respectful tone, “I would not——”

But the stern old man silenced him with a gesture.

“I know nothing as to what you would or would not do,” he said. “You have always been half-hearted in the cause of King George. From the beginning I’ve noticed a bent in you toward those rascals over there,” and his furious arm-sweep took in the whole region from Dorchester to Charlestown. “You were always talking of what they had to bear with; seldom indeed have I heard you speak of what we suffered.”

“The patriots——” began Ezra once more, but again he was interrupted.

“Patriots! Fiddlesticks, sir! Rebels is the name for them! Rebels to a good King, and skulkers who destroy the prosperity of their countrymen. My ships rot in their docks; my trade is going from me bit by bit, after my years of struggle to build it up.”

“It is the fortune of war, sir,” said Gilbert Scarlett, soothingly.

“War!” The gray brows drew themselves lower and the grim old face turned upon the speaker. “Do you call this war? It is not! It is an infamy that will recoil upon them, sir!”

“Say what you please,” retorted the adventurer coolly, “war it is, and a very pretty one, indeed, all things considered. For mechanics and husbandmen, these rebels of yours set to it right cleverly.”

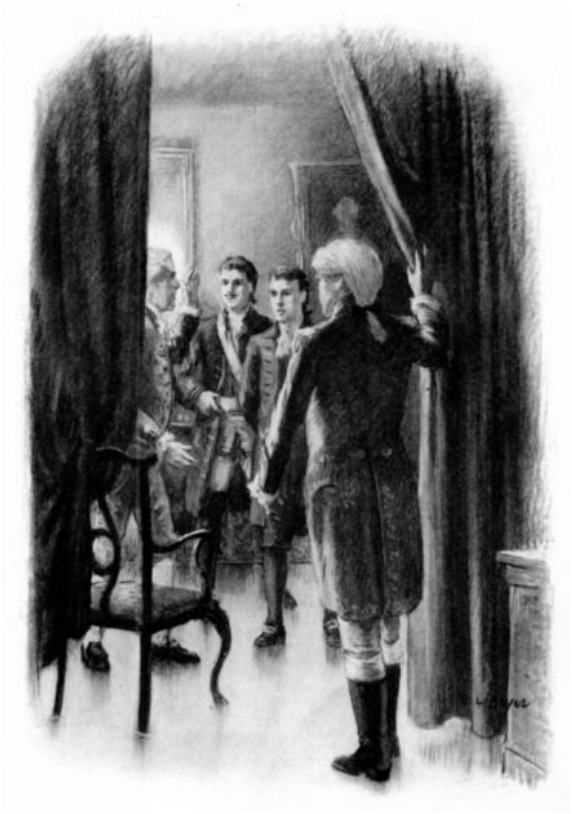
What the answer of Seth Prentiss would have been to this is not known. For another step sounded in the hall and a stout man in the uniform of a British general officer made his appearance. He had a round face and a bluff manner; his voice held the note of satire as he spoke.

“Hah!” said he, “and so we have here a student of warfare.” He swept Scarlett with a look. “And so you admire the works of the Americans?” he asked.

The young adventurer had arisen upon the appearance of Ezra’s grandfather; so he now struck his favorite attitude, his legs very far apart, his thumbs in his sword belt.

“In so far as they go,” replied he, “I have the honor to say, ‘Yes.’ Not that I consider their formations complete, mind you,” with an air of great assurance, “for I have seen much that could be corrected. But, when all is said and done, they have you fairly beleaguered; without reinforcements you cannot stir.”

As this very clearly stated the case, General Gage, for the officer was the British governor, looked at the speaker sharply.



GENERAL GAGE LOOKED AT THE SPEAKER

“Mr. Pennington gave us your name,” said he, “but I have forgotten it. Perhaps you would favor us, sir?”

Scarlett bowed elaborately.

“I am Gilbert Scarlett,” said he, “and have but lately served His Majesty of Spain. Also I have seen blows struck while in the armies of the Turk, the Elector of Hanover, and His Grace of Wurtemburg. I could add to these,” with modesty, “the names of the Swiss and some Northern nations, but,” as he shrugged his shoulders, “what purpose would it serve? From what I have already said you must have gathered that I know whereof I speak.”

The British general smiled satirically.

“You are overyoung to have served so many princes and states,” said he. “And I fear that your time with each one must have been a brief one.”

At this the dark brows of the young soldier of fortune came together; his hand hitched his sword around in a manner that Ezra well remembered, and was about to speak. But the lad placed a warning hand upon his arm, and gave him a look.

However, Gage paid no attention to the other’s reception of his remarks. Indeed, no sooner had he uttered them than he turned to the master of the house, and said:

“If you will be so obliging, Mr. Prentiss, we will continue our conference. This stranger gentleman and your grandson can, no doubt, await our convenience.”

“Sir,” replied the merchant, “I beg your pardon for leaving the room so abruptly. But I could not wait. I could not remain and think of him being here,” indicating Ezra, “under the weight of this accusation.”

“That is very natural,” returned Gage, good-naturedly enough. “But let us come at the matter in an orderly, soldierly way. When we have fully understood what Pennington has to say, then we shall call the lad in—and his very experienced friend also,” with rather a mocking look at Scarlett. “That will be much the best way.”

The aged merchant bowed to the suggestion of the British governor. But his stern eyes lost none of their anger; his jaws were set as grimly as ever. And as he preceded Gage up the hall, his manner was proud and unrelenting.

“It would seem,” said Scarlett, who had ignored Gage’s last fling with considerable effort, “that your grandfather is a gentleman who would judge and condemn one very quickly if he were so inclined.”

“He is a proud man and an intolerant one,” replied the boy. “He loves to rule, and, as you may have noticed, his rule is not likely to be of the lightest.”

Both Seth Prentiss and General Gage had disappeared into the room from which they had lately

emerged; and the grave-faced serving man brought the two visitors chairs, that they might rest while awaiting the British commander's pleasure.

The night was drawing on; indeed it was past midnight, and the quietness of the house in Sun Court was unbroken as they sat in silence, each moment expecting to be summoned. Ezra had no notion of how the matter would terminate. But he had expectations of learning something that would help the cause of the colonies; and so he sat patiently, alertly, never for a moment allowing his mind to drift from its purpose.

Without in the court a guard paced slowly and steadily up and down. The footsteps were heavy and measured; the soldier evidently had plates of steel set in his shoes; for when his heels struck the stones they gave out a metallic ring. Every now and then from the direction of Middle Street came the rush of hoofs.

"They seem to be pushing troops steadily toward the lower end of the town," said Scarlett, lowly, at length. "And to my mind that means nothing less than the delivery of an attack, or the expectation of receiving one."

"The lower end of the town! The delivery of an attack!"

These words startled Ezra. Like a flash the thought of a few hours before came to the boy. Finding that his dispatch bearer had failed him, Major Buckstone had delivered his information by word of mouth. And now, under cover of the darkness, Gage was hurrying his most formidable troops toward the Neck, meaning to hurl them forward and crush the slender line of guard.

As the moments slipped by, the lad's feelings can well be imagined. He was forced to wait. Even had he slipped out of his grandfather's house, he could give his commanders no warning. The river lay between them, the passage of which, under the circumstances, was all but impossible.

However, there was one thought that gave him courage and kept him cool.

"Dr. Warren received the dispatch in good time," he told himself. "He must have consulted with General Ward. The guard at the Neck has surely been made strong enough to resist any sally."

An hour went by and the greater part of another. Scarlett was beginning to grumble impatiently when Pennington pushed aside the hangings of the far doorway and beckoned them forward.

"It is surely time," said Scarlett, as he arose and shook himself together like a great dog. "Even the softest cushion grows hard, Master Pennington, when a man waits overlong."

But Pennington made no answer; there was a mocking light in his eyes, as he held back the hangings that they might enter; and an unpleasant smile was upon his lip.

In the centre of the room, which was a lofty one, was a huge table. At the head of this sat General Gage. Upon either side sat Ezra's grandfather and Major Buckstone.

As the latter caught sight of Ezra he arose to his feet and his heavy voice arose with him.

"Ah, my young gentlemen," he saluted. "Well met. I am more pleased to see you than I can express."

"You are very good, Major Buckstone," said Ezra calmly. He bowed to the angry old officer. There was a smile upon his face as though the meeting gave him real pleasure. This rendered the major furious.

"You are impudent, sir," he roared, banging the table with his fist. "You are insolent! But," in triumph, "there are several matters which we have before us which will make you change your manner in a moment."

He would have continued in this strain, had not Gage said, coldly:

"Kindly remember, Major Buckstone, that I am to conduct this affair."

The major grew purple; however, he saluted silently and resumed his seat.

The British governor-general regarded Ezra speculatively for a moment. He seemed to be gathering his thoughts. Finally, he cleared his throat and said:

"We have been informed by Mr. Pennington with regard to what passed a few nights ago. Also he has told us of his meeting with you," then nodding at the young soldier, who stood stiffly, "and with this gentleman, to-night."

There was a short pause; then the commander of the British continued:

"This dispatch—a paper of the utmost importance in furthering the King's cause—I understand was turned over by you to a certain mysterious person whom you have not named."

Ezra inclined his head.

“It is necessary,” and Gage leaned his stout body forward, “that the name and quality of this person be supplied us.”

“As to his quality,” returned Ezra Prentiss, “I can vouch for that. He is a most excellent gentleman and has the country’s peace at heart.”

Gage frowned.

“That tells us very little,” he said. “The country’s peace is claimed by those rascals across the river to be the thing nearest their thoughts. And yet you see them in arms against the King and his Parliament. You must go further than that, Master Prentiss.”

But Ezra shook his head.

“I am sorry,” said he. “But that I cannot do.”

The displeasure upon the face of Gage increased. He was about to continue; but suddenly his expression changed; he held up one hand and appeared to be listening intently. Then suddenly a smile overspread his countenance.

“It is more than likely that the misuse which you have made of this dispatch will do little harm,” he said. “But, for all,” with a keen look, “I would like much to have this unknown gentleman’s name.”

A deep rumbling sound came from off in the distance. This was what Gage’s quick ear had heard. Through one of the windows Ezra noted a red reflection glance across the sky.

“They have begun the sally,” he thought. But he kept his expression of his concern from appearing in his face; the gaze of Gage was fixed upon him, and it would not do to show any interest except in the matter at hand.

Major Buckstone also caught the sound. He looked at his commanding officer inquiringly.

“You have been prompt,” said he.

“It was necessary,” replied the governor, dryly. “A great deal of time had been wasted, you know.”

The bluff major seemed stung by this and was about to reply; but Gage’s upraised hand silenced him. The general gave Ezra his attention once more.

“You have not answered,” said he.

“I cannot,” returned the boy.

“I would hesitate in ascribing any motive to your actions that would be to your discredit,” said General Gage; “but in the face of this answer, what else can I do? Some time since, before that unfortunate occurrence at Lexington, I recall that you tried to be of some service to me, Master George. And your grandfather tells me, though reluctantly,” with a twinkle in his eyes, “that there have been numerous other things you have done to serve the King. But he tells me that you have had queer notions—mixed feelings—odd ways of showing your loyalty.”

“He has always had too much regard for the colonies,” said Seth Prentiss, and from the expression of his face this was nothing short of a crime. “He has done, it is true, many things that helped our cause,” continued the old merchant. “But he has done them because he thought it the best way to serve the colonies. The King was never in his heart.”

There was a pause. The rumble of the guns rolled across the city; the red flashes became incessant in the sky. And as they grew in volume and frequency, so did the good humor of General Gage increase.

“So long as he has served the King’s cause,” said the commander, “it matters but very little what his reasons were. But this affair of the dispatch is different.”

Here Gilbert Scarlett cleared his throat.

“If I may speak a word,” said he, and he bowed elaborately, “I will say that I see no great difference in what has already happened and what is happening now.”

Gage looked at him inquiringly.

“If the youth has had odd and curious ways of performing his services in the past,” said the soldier of fortune, “is it any matter for wonderment that he should have them in the present?”

“Why,” said Gage, apparently much struck by this reasoning, “what you say has the ring of philosophy.”

He tapped the edge of the table with his finger-tips for a moment. He was a good-natured man when things were working smoothly; and he showed it now.

“Who knows,” laughed he, “but what this is some sort of a pleasant surprise he has in store for us? As he deals in mysteries, much as Abdallah does, there is no telling.”

He turned to Ezra.

“So,” he continued, “we will allow the matter to rest for a time. Further action can be taken when any developments come to our notice.”

“And in the meantime,” inquired Major Buckstone, “what disposition is to be made with regard to the prisoners?”

“Oh, I would scarcely regard them in that light,” replied Gage carelessly. “We will allow them what run of the city the townspeople have. Never fear but that they will be at hand when wanted. The ways out of Boston are closely watched, my dear major, as Master Pennington can well tell you. They cannot get out, should they desire to do so ever so much.”

The major glowered at Ezra, displeased. The old merchant sat silently grim and unbelieving. Pennington, with satire in his eyes, rubbed the palms of his hands together softly.

Then there came a clatter of hoofs that broke the silence of Sun Court. They paused under the window, and the rider was heard dismounting. An instant later the heavy knocker at the door of Seth Prentiss’ house gave its thunderous rat-tat-tat.

“Something very urgent, it would seem,” said Pennington.

The man servant hurriedly brought into the governor’s presence a much bespattered and all but breathless young officer of dragoons.

“Well, sir?” inquired Gage, sharply.

“News from Boston Neck, sir,” and the young officer saluted hurriedly. “The attack was made, but the Americans were in large force and we were repulsed. Then they attacked in turn and drove us back. The George tavern has been burned by them and we have suffered some loss.”

“Very well!” The general’s voice was now sharp and angry. “If there is any further action, let a report be sent me at once.”

The dragoon saluted and disappeared. Gage turned to Ezra.

“It may be that this upsetting of my plans has been caused by you,” he said. “And then again, perhaps Abdallah’s information may have been erroneous. However, I shall soon come at the real facts; and you shall remain in Boston until I do.”

CHAPTER XI—TELLS HOW EZRA AND SCARLETT THRIVED IN BOSTON, AND HOW THEY LEFT IT IN THE NIGHT

Ezra Prentiss and Gilbert Scarlett left the house of the former’s grandfather in the dark of that April morning. And as they crossed the threshold, Gage’s voice sounded in their ears.

“Mind you what I say, and be careful to follow it out. Make your quarters at the ‘Jolly Rover’ Inn, in Ship Street; and report to Major Buckstone at headquarters between ten o’clock and noon each day.”

“And never let me hear of you or see you again,” said old Seth Prentiss to Ezra, “until you have cleared yourself of all suspicion in this matter. As you stand now, George Prentiss, you are labeled in my mind as a traitor, as your brother Ezra is.”

Ezra said nothing; he merely bent his head in a mute good-bye; and with Scarlett set off through the dark court. A sergeant of grenadiers bore them company; it was his duty to see that they went to the “Jolly Rover” as directed, and also that they were not molested by the guards that patrolled the streets.

They passed from Sun Court into Fleet Street, and from thence into Ship Street. This was on the harbor front and was badly kept and worse lighted. At one end was what was known as the North Battery; the wharves of merchants and dockyards of shipbuilders lined the water side of it; while upon the other were gloomy-fronted warehouses and the offices of shipmen of various degrees.

Midway, at White Bread Alley, they came to the “Jolly Rover.” It was tightly closed; not a light was to be seen.

“We are all hard put to it because of the closing of the inns,” said the sergeant of grenadiers. “There is no place to spend a comfortable hour when off duty of a night.”

He beat loudly upon the door. For a long time there was no result save the sharp summons of a guard who rounded the corner of Foster Lane.

“What’s this?” demanded the guard. “Have you no homes to go to that you are abroad at such an hour? And will nothing do but that you must make noise enough to wake the dead?”

“Use your eyes and your lanthorn, soldier,” spoke the sergeant gruffly. “If we are abroad it is because we must be. And as for the noise, it is made but to carry out the governor’s orders.”

The guard held up his light. Then, recognizing the sergeant, he saluted.

“Our orders call for the apprehension of all found abroad after hours,” apologized he.

A nightcapped head, lighted up by a sputtering candle, appeared at one of the upper windows of the inn.

“What now?” demanded a rough voice. “Plague take you, neighbors, to go battering at an honorable man’s door.”

“Come down and draw your bolts,” said the sergeant of grenadiers.

“Not I, indeed,” answered the man in the nightcap, and with a promptness that caused both Ezra and Scarlett to laugh. “I obey the law, gentlemen; no man in the town of Boston minds it better. And the law says that all places of public entertainment must out with their lights and up with their shutters at sundown.”

“If you don’t want your door in splinters, you’ll come down and open it,” said the sergeant. “I bring you two persons whom you are to harbor, at command of General Gage.”

“That,” replied the nightcapped one, in an altered tone, “sets a different face upon the matter. Why did you not say so at once? I will be down instantly.”

The candle vanished; a little later, after a great deal of clatter and clinking of bars and chains, the door opened; the man in the nightcap was shown to be a squat, broad-shouldered personage with gold rings in his ears and the aspect of a seafarer.

“Now, open your ears,” spoke the British sergeant, briefly. “And give heed to what I’m going to tell you.”

“Ay, ay,” replied the host of the “Jolly Rover.”

“These two are to lodge here and pay for their own entertainment. You are to report at headquarters at once if they are absent for more than a half day at a time.”

The landlord regarded the newcomers with no great favor.

“I’ll see to it,” he growled.

“Mind that you do. And, when I am gone, out with the lights and on with the bolts at once.”

So saying the British sergeant turned and stepped out into Ship Street once more. The door closed behind him; the bars and chains went up, and again the man with the rings in his ears looked at his guests.

“I will not say that I am pleased to have you,” he told them with great frankness, “for the custom of such as you brings little but trouble to an inn. I’ll have soldiers about the place constantly; and, if you are gentlemen of any consequence, spies will be as thick as flies in August.”

“We are sorry to give you any trouble,” said Ezra. “But we were directed to come here and could not well refuse.”

The man grinned.

“I suppose not,” said he. “Well, if it be any comfort for you to know it, you are not the only gentlemen in Boston who are in the black books of the King’s officers. The town is full of suspected men. General Gage is a governor who acts mighty quickly in such matters, even if he won’t,” here the grin grew broader, “do the same in weightier things.”

The flickering candle lit up the place but dimly; the ceiling was low, the walls were paneled; in furnishing and equipment the room resembled the cabin of a ship.

Scarlett, who had been observing the landlord, here remarked:

“You are a man who has followed the sea in your day.”

The other nodded.

“For a full forty year,” he said. “Man and boy I’ve spliced, knotted, hauled and reefed in every kind of craft that’s sailed from here to the Horn, and from there to the China Seas.”

“A tarry, healthy profession,” commented Scarlett. “I have known many shipmen in my day, and they have been mostly sound fellows and honest.”

The man took off his nightcap and scratched his head.

“As to health,” said he, “I agree with you. But there have been as big rascals walked the decks of ships as any they’ve ever bred ashore. I remember when I sailed my last voyage in the ‘Champion,’ we had a skipper that was as great a villain as ever robbed his employers.”

At the mention of the vessel’s name, Ezra became more attentive.

“The ‘Champion’?” said he. “What owners?”

“Prentiss & Son, Boston.”

Scarlett gave Ezra a quick look. The boy regarded the innkeeper with interest.

“I recall the old ‘Champion’ very well. Her timbers are now rotting on a reef in the South Pacific,” said he.

“Hello,” said the man with the rings in his ears. He peered at the boy through the candle-light. “And who might you be?”

“My name is Prentiss,” answered the lad. “I am the son of James Prentiss, one of the ‘Champion’s’ owners.”

The man thrust out a great broad hand.

“Young gentleman,” said he, “if you’ll do me the honor, I’d like to shake your hand.”

Ezra smiled and gripped the big paw.

“Your father,” continued the other, “was the finest man in this colony. I’ve sailed for many owners, but he was the best of them all. Your grandfather now,” and the ex-sailor’s expression of admiration greatly changed, “was a most excellent merchant. But he expected much and gave but little. That little was, to be sure, regularly and promptly paid; but that is the best I can say.

“But James Prentiss was different. He had a heart in his body for a sailorman. And if one went out of his way to serve him, he’d see to it that he was properly rewarded.”

“A good quality,” commented Scarlett, approvingly. “It is a proof of appreciation and also encourages effort.”

“Quite so, comrade,” replied the host. “It does that very thing; and I can prove it to you. On the last voyage of the ‘Champion,’ she had for her master a Hingham man named Pickering. I was her first mate and she carried a mixed cargo for trading among the islands. Pickering was a man who believed in handspikes and belaying pins in his treatment of the crew, and he was not long out before they were all but in a state of mutiny.

“This proved a fortunate thing for Prentiss & Son,” continued the landlord. “We ran on the reef one moonlight night with a light wind blowing and Pickering at the wheel. So when he proposed to abandon ship and cargo without an effort to save either, I objected.”

“He must have been a coward as well as a bully,” spoke Ezra.

“No, he was a knave. I’d never suspected the true reason of it all if it hadn’t been for the bos’n. He’d noticed the same sail hanging in our wake for three days, and he spoke to me of it. Then I saw the real truth. Pickering had laid the ‘Champion’ on the rocks deliberately. Then his plan was for all hands to make away; the stranger was to approach, quietly take in our cargo, and Prentiss & Son would be the poorer for a fortune.”

“A very complete rascal, indeed,” said Scarlett. “What did you do?”

“Clapped him in irons and warned the strange vessel off with a show of six-pounders. Afterward I got a brig at Valparaiso, put the cargo into her, and disposed of it to good advantage in the regular way. For that service old Seth Prentiss paid me a first mate’s wages; but his son,” turning to Ezra, “your father, was more open-handed. It was through him that I could at last afford to give up the sea and buy out the ‘Jolly Rover.’”

They talked in the same strain for a while longer. But a patrol, knocking loudly at the door and bidding them extinguish the light, at last put an end to it.

The seaman innkeeper led his guests to their rooms.

“I can give you no light,” said he, “and I’m main sorry for it. But you can manage to sleep without it, I’m sure.”

He had said good-night to both, when he knocked at Ezra’s door and reopened it.

“Lad,” said he in a low tone, “your father was a friend to me. And if I, William Stacey, can do anything for you or your friend at any time, all you have to do is to give it a name.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stacey,” replied Ezra, gratefully. “I’ll remember that.”

The meeting with William Stacey was a most fortunate thing for Ezra. He and Scarlett, before many days had passed, found that they could not take a step without a spy being at their heels. Their every action, so it seemed, was noted by a sharp-eyed stranger. They at length mentioned this to Stacey; he grinned and observed:

“I didn’t expect anything else, gentlemen. People like you are left at liberty so that you’ll in the end lead Gage’s spies to something worth paying attention to. But I think I can help you at times when you especially want to escape their notice.”

And this he did very successfully. Changes of clothing and large wigs, which were then generally worn, combed in various ways, served to throw the spies off the scent at such times as they were worn. And the two made the rounds of the city in all the guises that Stacey’s supply of “slops” could provide them with. As sailors, mechanics and common loafers, they sought information as to the British distribution of force; each battery was carefully marked in their minds, for they dared put nothing upon paper; and each item of whispered news that was picked up was remembered.

They soon learned that Gage feared an uprising of the townspeople in case the city should be attacked. He knew that the citizens had rifles in plenty; and to prevent any possible use of them, he caused it to be made public that in case the town arose against his troops, he’d give it over to the torch and take to his ships.

Then it was proposed that all those who would lodge their weapons at Faneuil Hall might depart from the city with their families and effects. Thousands immediately complied with this; for a time it seemed that all Boston was on the move. The Provincial Congress made an equally liberal move. All Tories who desired to enter the city were permitted to do so. But finally the outgoing townspeople received a check.

“The Tories under Ruggles,” William Stacey told Ezra, “think it a bad policy to let them go. They claim that the Whig inhabitants are necessary to save the town from assault and conflagration. They also threaten to lay down their arms and give the King’s cause no further aid if the people are not kept within the lines.”

The late days of April had passed and May was well advanced. From without the news came of the progress of the American cause. Recruits were reported to be coming strongly into their camp. Their works were growing in extent and strength day by day. A Continental Congress had met at Philadelphia and were considering the matter of a commander-in-chief for the colonial army and assuming the general direction of the war.

One day in May, Ezra saw General Putnam march about twenty-five hundred Americans from Cambridge to Charlestown, which was deserted by its population. This little army crossed Bunker and Breed’s Hills, came out by Captain Henly’s house, and passed into the main street near the old ferry. This was to inspire the army with confidence; they had gotten within gunshot of the enemy when they were ordered back, and so returned to Cambridge.

A spirited fight took place on the 17th near Wheeler’s Point. On the 21st, two sloops and an armed schooner sailed out of Boston, being so ordered by General Gage. They carried a detachment of troops to Grape Island, their purpose being to seize upon a quantity of hay which was stored there. Scarlett got the facts of this expedition and related them to Ezra with great gusto.

“The vessels landed the troops on the island and the hay was being placed on board. But they were not long undisturbed. The bells began to ring at Weymouth; the people assembled on a point of land near the island and fired at the troops. But their rifles could not carry so far. Then General Thomas, whom I understand is an officer of experience, came up with three companies of your farmer soldiers. Though under fire of the vessels, these launched a lighter and a sloop and so reached the island. The British, like churls, never waited them, but took to their craft and sailed back to Boston.

“Your friends, so I have heard, burned some eighty tons of hay which they could not take off; and also a barn was destroyed. The cattle on the island were then taken to Weymouth.”

Some time later there were like encounters at Hog and Noddles Islands near Chelsea. General Putnam and Dr. Warren both took part in these affairs. The British lost about twenty killed and fifty wounded, besides some swivels and light guns.

The fights on the islands became so frequent that the Americans began to venture out with small armed craft and some successes were had, which excited the ire of the British sea-dogs in command of the heavy ships in the bay.

About this time the army of Gage was largely reinforced; a number of troop ships arrived, also large quantities of stores, and a fleet of vessels of war. Thus encouraged, the British governor on June 12th issued his famous proclamation in which he threatened all “rebels and traitors” and offered pardon to those who should lay down their arms. In this latter Samuel Adams and John Hancock were excepted. It was Gage’s intention to punish them, so he said, as their actions

deserved.

“It will serve one good purpose,” said Ezra in speaking of the proclamation to his companion, Scarlett. “It will rouse the people to a greater anger than before.”

“Gage is a very dull-witted gentleman,” replied Scarlett. “He once had a chance to add a person of experience,” here he twirled his moustaches, “to his command, but, by his insults and insinuations, lost him for good.”

“He has those now, who will perhaps prove to be of quicker thought,” said Ezra. “Generals Clinton, Howe and Burgoyne arrived in the frigate ‘Cerberus’ some little time since. Their hands will be felt, I fear, when the time comes to strike a blow at the colonial army.”

“General Gage is going to send forces to occupy Dorchester Heights and the two hills near Charlestown,” said William Stacey, upon the day after the proclamation. “He now has ten thousand men and is beginning to take pride in his strength.”

Reports ran riot through the city. The British troops, privates and officers both, took on a different aspect. Their appearance grew smarter; they stepped with a jauntier tread, their spirits were higher. They paraded more frequently; their drums seemed to beat more briskly; their fifes to squeal more shrilly. More artillery was put ashore; the gunboats and armed craft of lighter draught became much more enterprising.

From these indications Ezra Prentiss drew that there was something of moment about to happen. But the exact nature of it all, for he could place no dependence upon the gossip that reached him, was not made known to him until the morning of the fifteenth of June when he and Scarlett went to make their daily report to Major Buckstone.

That bluff, honest old soldier was seated frowning over some papers.

“Hah!” said he to Ezra, as the sentry led them in, “here is a communication just come to me regarding you, young sir. It will require your attention at once.”

Ezra took the paper from the major’s hand and scanned it. It ran as follows:

> “Major Buckstone:
>
> “Sir:—When George Prentiss, my grandson, next reports to you, inform him that his presence is required at my house in Sun Court at once.
>
> “Your obliged and humble servant,
> “Seth Prentiss.”

“I will go immediately,” said the boy. “Thank you, Major Buckstone.”

They left the headquarters and proceeded along the street in the direction of the old merchant’s mansion.

“Something,” said Gilbert Scarlett, “is in the air. Within an hour you will be much wiser than you are now at this moment.”

“It must be of more than ordinary importance,” said Ezra. “For he said on that last night at his house, you remember, that he never wanted to see me or hear of me again.”

“Until you had cleared yourself of mishandling Major Buckstone’s dispatch,” the other reminded him. “Perhaps the chance has now come for you to do that.”

The two parted at the point where Fish Street opened into Prince’s; Scarlett went his way toward the “Jolly Rover,” while Ezra continued along Prince’s until he reached Sun Court.

The boy’s knock brought an immediate answer. The grave-faced man servant showed his pleasure at sight of the youth.

“Your grandfather has been expecting you, Master George,” said he. “I will tell him that you have arrived.”

To be constantly forced to move under false colors was a bitter thing for Ezra. He was a lad who was frankness itself and one who detested methods that smacked of trickery. But to have all in Boston continue to believe him to be his brother George he felt was necessary if he was to aid the colonial cause. There was not a moment of his stay in Boston, during this period, or a time that he answered to his brother’s name, that his honesty and shame did not urge him to proclaim himself. But he stubbornly held this impulse in check.

“If it were a matter of my own,” he frequently told himself, “I could act as I saw fit. But this matter is not my own.”

His grandfather greeted him in his library, a stately room filled with morning sunshine, and furnished after the stiff fashion of that day. Seated at a window with a tall volume upon his knees,

was a striking-looking officer, attired in the brilliant uniform of a British general.

“I would not have thought you interested in such things as this, Mr. Prentiss,” this gentleman was saying, not noticing the boy’s entrance. “It denotes rare judgment and taste in the binding. And the book itself is very rare,” with much admiration. “I know of only one other in existence.”

“The gathering of such was a folly of my son’s,” said the old man sternly.

“Folly!” The soldier laughed amusedly. “Well, that’s all to one’s taste, I suppose. But for my part, the more follies of this sort,” nodding toward a great heap of other books which he apparently had already inspected, “a man possesses, the more apt I would be to like him.”

“And he was not alone in his folly,” said the old merchant. “He left two sons, both of whom have inherited more or less of his manner of thought.” He gestured grimly toward Ezra as he added: “This is one of them.”

The general looked over his shoulder at the boy; then he arose, brushing traces of dust, left by the books, from his immaculate uniform. He was a polished man of the world, plainly a scholar and unquestionably a gentleman.

“Ah, yes,” said he. He took a step toward Ezra and held out his hand. “I ask your pardon,” he continued, “and am greatly pleased to see you.”

“This is General Burgoyne,” said old Mr. Prentiss to Ezra. “He happens to be here, having heard of the library, and will no doubt join with me in what I am about to say to you.”

The officer smiled pleasantly at Ezra.

“I have heard of your case from Major Buckstone,” said he. He was about to proceed, but the merchant interrupted him.

“And no doubt,” said Seth Prentiss, “you think the transaction a rascally and traitorous one.”

“I never make up my mind to things,” answered Burgoyne, “until I have sounded them for myself.”

He reseated himself and took up the book which had before engaged his attention. There was the same pleasant smile upon his face; he delicately turned the leaves and continued:

“I give your grandson far too much credit for clear understanding than to believe him in any way connected with this absurd condition which,” with a laugh, “the colonists call a siege. That ten thousand peasants can coop up an equal number of the King’s trained troops is too monstrous for any sane mind to believe. But Gage is a good-natured gentleman who believes in mild measures. Since Clinton and Howe have arrived, things will be vastly different. Let us get among the rebels and we’ll soon find elbow-room.”

With that he gave his attention to the precious volume which he held on his knee. The merchant turned to his grandson.

“I told you when I last saw you, that I was done with you until you had redeemed yourself. I had not thought to help you in any way, but it appears that blood is thicker than water, and I want to give you a chance of proving to me and His Majesty’s governor and officers that you are not what you have appeared to be.”

Ezra inclined his head, but was silent.

“Within a few days there will be a happening that——”

The handsome head of General Burgoyne was lifted from the book like a flash. There was a ring of reproof in his voice, as he cut the old man short.

“It would be well to specify nothing,” said he.

“And I desire to hear nothing of the King’s business from you, sir,” said Ezra, hastily.

Much as the young patriot desired to serve the cause of liberty, he could not bear to do so at the expense of his grandfather. He felt that it would be shameful to take advantage of the old man’s unguarded eagerness.

A flush stained the old merchant’s hard face. He bowed to Burgoyne.

“I ask your pardon,” said he. “In my anxiety to give my grandson this chance to reëstablish himself, I had forgotten more important things.”

“I understand perfectly,” said the general, once more smiling. “The thing was natural enough.” He turned toward Ezra, his well-kept hands caressing the book. “It will be sufficient for you to know that there will soon be an opportunity for all loyal subjects of King George to show that they are such.” He paused a moment, then went on: “It would be well for you to take advantage

of this at once. There has been talk of curtailing your liberty to some extent."

A thrill of dismay ran through the boy.

"That means imprisonment," he thought. "If I don't join with the British, I'll be clapped in irons."

But he concealed his feelings. His face was unruffled as he made reply.

"I thank you, General Burgoyne, for the hint. You may rely upon me to act for the best."

The officer shot Ezra a penetrating glance. But he said nothing, and with a little shrug, he turned to his book.

"And now," said the merchant, "that is all. I feel that I have done my duty toward you. It remains for you to do the rest. Harrison," as the servant answered his pull at the bell-cord, "show this young gentleman out."

Once in the street, Ezra made all haste to the "Jolly Rover."

"Something must be done at once," he muttered. "I'll have to contrive to leave Boston within twenty-four hours, or I'm done for."

The first persons he saw at the inn were Scarlett and the landlord in close converse in a far corner of the long room. Scarlett beckoned him at once, and the boy approached them.

"Sit down," said the soldier of fortune, "and as there are two of our shadows keeping us under observation, I would suggest that you do not allow anything that we might say to make you change countenance."

"You have news then?" questioned Ezra.

"Most urgent news for you at least," said Gilbert Scarlett.

He pulled up his soft leather boots and twirled one point of his moustache.

"At first," said he, "like the others here I was not at all sure as to which side you favored in this struggle. But since becoming more intimate with you, I have discovered at least enough," laughing, "to make up my mind."

"A son of James Prentiss could not be for anything else than liberty," said the ex-first mate of the "Champion," stoutly.

"Thank you, Mr. Stacey," said Ezra, quietly.

"Well," said the adventurer, "let's to our news. It has transpired," he proceeded to Ezra, "that General Gage will at last make a move. A large body of troops will cross the river with entrenching tools within the next three nights."

"But you don't know exactly when or where?"

"No," replied the innkeeper as the other hesitated. "I had the news from a source that can't be wrong; but it went no farther than to say that the movement would be carried out within three nights."

Ezra sat for a moment regarding his friends.

"There are two reasons, then," he said at length, "why I should leave Boston at once."

The others said nothing, but waited for what was to come.

"I must warn General Ward," continued the boy. "That is the first and most important. The second is that I must keep myself out of a dungeon."

"Your visit to your grandfather, then, has not been without result," hazarded the soldier of fortune shrewdly.

"No," said Ezra. "On the contrary, what I heard there was sharp and definite enough." Then he turned to the innkeeper. "Mr. Stacey, I will trouble you to-night for one of your suits of slops and any other thing that may be useful in hiding my identity. If you can also direct me to a place where a boat is to be had, I shall be much in your debt."

"No son of your father's can speak of being in my debt," said the old sailor. He pondered a moment while the others watched him. Then he proceeded: "A disguise is simple enough. But a boat is a different matter. However, I think I can do it." Then he laid a hand upon Ezra's arm. "You are running a great risk in making such a venture."

"I would be running one equally great if I did not take it," replied the boy.

"The waters all about the city are fairly choked with armed craft," said Scarlett. "How can we

pass them and get fairly away?”

“We?” said Ezra.

“Why, to be sure, we.” The speaker gestured his entire acceptance of the situation. “Do you forget that I promised to stand your friend if you needed one?”

“I would shake your hand, comrade,” spoke Ezra, much touched, “if it were not for our being watched.”

“Don’t give me too much credit,” laughed Scarlett, his moustaches pointing upward. “You forget that if you stand a chance of going to a dungeon, I would not be far behind you; for I am not much beyond their suspicions.”

“You are right,” said Ezra, “and that makes it easier for me to accept your offer.” He bent his head toward them and his voice lowered. “It will be a desperate risk, no doubt. But, somehow, I feel that if there is a chance to make the crossing, we will do it.”

“Spoken like a lad of mettle,” commented the landlord of the “Jolly Rover.” “That is the sort of spirit that carries a man well on his way in anything he undertakes.”

The remainder of the day they spent together in one of the upper chambers, where they would be well out of the way of all prying eyes and listening ears.

“There is a brig tied up at Burrough’s wharf, just opposite Battery Alley,” said the innkeeper. “Her skipper is still aboard of her and he is an old shipmate of mine. I can get a dory from him if the case be made plain to his understanding. Then we can put into it some fishing-tackle, floats, trawls and such like as was used by the fishermen who once drew their living from the harbor.”

“An excellent idea,” applauded Scarlett. “It reminds me of a little experience I had once in the Bosphorus while I was in the service of the Moslem. And if this ends as fortunately as that, we shall do very well, indeed.”

As it was found necessary to get some idea of the anchorage of the heavy vessels and the patrolling guard of the smaller, the ex-seaman got out a long glass and they ascended to the garret, where from one of the dusty windows they could sweep the bay.

Ships of the line and frigates were there in plenty. Heavy troop ships, and others which had lately arrived with cargoes of supplies, lay sluggishly tugging at their chains.

“There is nothing to be feared from the seaward,” said Stacey. “So there is little or no activity. The smaller vessels are further up in the rivers. So your best plan, as I see it, is to take a small lug-sail in the bottom of your boat, pull straight out into the harbor, and when you think you are beyond the danger line, up with your sail and head for the nearest safe point that you can make.”

This seemed a most excellent piece of advice, and after some discussion it was adopted. As night drew on the two ate a hearty supper.

“It will help both our strength and our courage,” said Scarlett. “My experience has taught me that a well cared for stomach is a most necessary thing in an adventure.”

It was eleven o’clock when they donned some worn fisherman’s clothing and each a tarpaulin hat. Both wore their hair clubbed in seafaring fashion; and with them they carried the trawl-lines and other equipment that Stacey provided.

The latter had preceded them; so they stole along, keeping in the deepest shadows, toward Burrough’s wharf. They narrowly escaped several guards; but at last came safely to the place where the brig was tied up. The dory was ready; and Stacey and his friend the skipper were awaiting them.

“There are two strong sweeps, a mast and sail in the bottom of her,” the innkeeper told them. “Keep your minds clear as to the position of the war-ships and guard vessels; pull straight out of the harbor between them, if you can. It is a moonless night, and so far the luck is with you.”

The speaker shook their hands as did the brig’s master.

“I’m taking a risk in doing this,” said the latter. “But, then, every man must do what he can for the cause, and this is my share for the time.”

There were low-voiced good-byes spoken, then Ezra and Scarlett stepped into the dory, slipped the sweeps into place, headed out into the dark harbor and gave way.

More and more distant grew the few military lights on shore. Nearer and nearer drew the belt of ship lights; and the vessels themselves began to lift their dark bulks out of the water like huge monsters of the deep, watchful, waiting, full of silent terrors.

CHAPTER XII—SHOWS HOW EZRA AND THE ADVENTURER WON BY THE BRITISH

The night was moonless and without stars; a fresh breeze was blowing from the landward; this, together with the strong strokes of the rowers, drove the dory forward at a good rate of speed.

Two tall ranges of lights were visible directly ahead and the oarsmen headed to pass in the thick murk between them. And this they would have safely done had it not been for the unforeseen. The little craft was driving along in fine style, when suddenly out of the darkness loomed the towering bulk of a ship without lights. Before they could prevent it, the dory fouled the chains; Scarlett was thrown from his seat amid a clatter of oars.

A sharp outcry came from the ship's deck. Feet were heard running forward and lights began to flash.

"Quick!" breathed Ezra, dragging the discomfited adventurer into his seat. "To your oars before they make us out."

Scarlett had just recovered his stroke and pushed the boat away from the ship's bow, when a solid shot, directed by the owner of a pair of sharp eyes, fell into the water beside them. Had they delayed another moment, it would have dropped into the boat, stove in the bottom and sunk them.

But they not only escaped this by their quick recovery, but also escaped the lights that were lowered over the side.

"It was a clever trick," spoke Scarlett, guardedly. "They kept no lights burning, for the purpose of entrapping any one that should attempt to steal by."

They pulled noiselessly away, out into the harbor and into the thick of the British ships. They heard the creaking of blocks as boats were lowered from the vessel with which they had collided; then they heard the splash of their oars. But they continued their strong, regular tugging at the sweeps, and gradually left the sounds behind. One by one they passed the ships; once, indeed, there came a doubtful hail; but they rested upon their oars for a full ten minutes and it was not repeated. Finally, as far as they could make out, they were free of all obstacles and fell to the sweeps with a will.

In a little while again, they stepped the mast and hoisted the lug-sail. The breeze caught and filled this, and away the boat swept into the darkness, like a night-bird skimming the surface of the sea.

After a good hour's running they began to beat to and fro; but when the first glimmer of dawn struck the water they found themselves between Spectacle and Castle Islands; sighting Dorchester Point, they put for it with the lug full of wind, for several small sail of a suspicious nature were in plain view toward Thompson's Island.

As the dory neared the point, the American sentinels sighted it; there was a three-gun battery planted at no great distance, and this was trained upon the flying little craft. Some difficulty was had in getting ashore, and when they had scrambled to solid ground, they found a file of men, ununiformed, but armed with long-barreled rifles and in charge of a youthful lieutenant.

"You will please give an account of yourselves," announced this latter in a businesslike tone of voice.

Scarlett sat down, drew off his boots and emptied the water from them. Ezra, however, gave his attention to the lieutenant.

"Sir," said he, "we are sympathizers of the colonies who have just made our way out of Boston through the fleet."

The young officer, who wore a new, spick and span blue uniform turned up with red, regarded them suspiciously.

"That," said he, with a glance out at the ominous black hulks that were now plainly showing through a faint early morning mist, "would be a hard thing to do."

"It was," smiled Ezra, "and good fortune alone enabled us to accomplish it."

The young lieutenant, proud of his new trappings and his new office, saw fit to regard the two with great suspicion.

"My orders are to apprehend any one coming from the seaward," spoke he, importantly. "So it will be my duty to hold you until the colonel arrives to inspect this post."

"And when will that be?" asked Gilbert Scarlett.

"Toward noon, or perhaps somewhat later," replied the lieutenant.

The soldier of fortune drew on his wet boots and stood up.

“Sir,” observed he, his legs wide apart and his thumbs hooked in his belt, “you seem to have very little notion as to the value of time. We have but a few hours to go about the business of saving the colonial army.”

The youthful officer started at this. But there was that in the hectoring tone of Gilbert Scarlett which he did not like. So he frowned and said sharply:

“If you have anything to impart my commission, issued by the Provincial Congress, makes me a proper person to hear it.”

That the speaker was right, even though unnecessarily stubborn, Ezra saw at once. But with the hot-headed adventurer it was a different matter.

Without more ado, he whipped out his long sword, and addressed the lieutenant with careless superiority.

“Step to one side,” directed he, “and have your fellows do the same, or I’ll contrive a piece of work for you that none of you will forget.”

The lieutenant spoke swiftly to his men. They threw forward their rifles; and Ezra had just sprung between them and Scarlett when there came a quiet, chuckling voice, saying:

“Hot work, Master Prentiss! Hot work, upon my word!”

All eyes went toward the point from where the voice proceeded; and all, even to the angry Scarlett and the stubborn lieutenant, burst into a laugh.

Upon a large flat stone, at no great distance, sat a dwarfish figure. The short legs were crossed Turkish fashion, and the huge head, with its stiff crest of hair, was bent forward, the chin resting upon his palms.

“What!” said Ezra, astonished. “Is it you, Porcupine?”

The imp grinned, showing his strong white teeth.

“It is no one else,” answered he, arising. “I had just come down this way to look about me before the others were awake. And,” with a look at Scarlett, “it’s a good thing that I have. Your friend there seems to want to get himself into mischief.”

Scarlett sheathed his sword with a flourish.

“I crave the pardon of your assured smallness,” said he with a sweep of his feathered hat. “It is a trick of the temper that lasts but a moment. I also,” turning to the lieutenant, “ask pardon of you, sir.”

The young officer nodded stiffly and gestured the long rifles away. Then he turned and gave ear to the dwarf, who claimed his attention.

“Porcupine, you call him?” said Scarlett, his eyes traveling over the stunted body. “And a very good name it is, indeed. Was there ever such a stiff crest of hair upon a human before? Have you known him long?”

“He rode with myself and some friends from Philadelphia last fall,” replied Ezra, “and proved himself of value to us all. He is faithful, watchful, shrewd and has uncommon courage.”

“Excellent!” cried the soldier of fortune, with high admiration. “In those you have some beautiful qualities for so small a youth.”

At the Porcupine’s low-spoken words, the face of the American lieutenant changed in expression.

“If Master Brewster and his friends will vouch for these gentlemen,” said he, “that will be enough for me.”

“I will fetch them at once,” said the dwarf.

Ezra advanced a step or two eagerly.

“You don’t mean to say that Nat is hereabouts!” said he.

The Porcupine grinned and replied:

“Not only Nat, but Ben and George as well. We all rode this way yesterday, after a journey which we had been on for Dr. Warren to the lower counties.”

“Then make haste and tell them of this,” said Ezra, delighted. “Tell them that it is of great importance that they should come at once.”

“I’m off,” said the Porcupine. And away he darted, his short legs twinkling at a most marvelous speed.

“It will all be arranged without difficulty in a little time now,” said Ezra to the adventurer.

“Fortune favors us in spite of my bad temper,” replied Scarlett. Then he added, after the fashion of a philosopher: “Never allow your dependence upon your sword to become your greatest asset. It is a mistake. The wise man always waits until the end before he takes matters into his own keeping. For at the last moment, Fortune may fling her rarest gifts at his feet.”

The lieutenant now spoke.

“In these days, gentlemen,” said he, “one cannot be too careful. I am dangerously placed here, and with but few men. I can, therefore, afford to trust nobody.”

“Sir,” said Scarlett promptly and with a wave of the hand, “say no more about it. You are young and unaccustomed to your work; but you have done well for all.”

The lieutenant was fully as old as the speaker; and he was regarding Scarlett with a puzzled look, when there came a clatter of hoofs upon the road and up clashed Ben Cooper, George Prentiss and Nat Brewster, the latter bearing the dwarf before him in the saddle.

With one accord they leaped to the ground and clustered about Ezra with cries of welcome and delight.

“Why, it’s a good month since you left us,” cried Ben.

“We’d all but given you up for dead,” said George, gravely.

“But we’re glad to have you back,” spoke Nat Brewster, quietly. “The cause would be the poorer for the loss of Ezra Prentiss.”

“Master Brewster,” and the lieutenant addressed Nat, whose grave manner always caused him to be selected from the group upon occasions like this, “these gentlemen but a short time ago landed here in a boat. They claim to have come from Boston, and this one,” indicating Ezra, “claims to be acquainted with you.”

“I can vouch for him,” cried Nat, his strong hand upon Ezra’s shoulder, “and,” with a quick look at Scarlett, “if this gentleman is a friend of his, I can vouch for him also.”

“While my acquaintance with him is something less than two months’ duration,” said Ezra, “I can safely say that he is a friend in everything that the term implies.”

Nat shook Scarlett by the hand, and Ben, George and the Porcupine followed in their turn; and as they did so, Ezra told the adventurer their names.

“I have heard of you all many times,” said Scarlett with vast satisfaction. “And I have listened to some of your experiences of nights at our inn, the ‘Jolly Rover.’ After hearing them, and seeing you, I can say that it all affords me much pleasure.”

“I recall Ezra telling us of you after his return from Chelmsford some time since,” said Nat. “He said that you appeared to be a gentleman of parts.”

The adventurer assumed his favorite attitude.

“If experience makes for quality, I am to be pardoned if I claim it,” said he. “I was younger than the youngest of you when I fought my first field, and since then I have seen service under many flags.” All the time he spoke, and in fact before he began, his eyes went alternately from Ezra to George and back again. Now he broke off his remarks and addressed the latter: “Your name, sir, is——?”

“George Prentiss,” replied the boy.

Scarlett turned to Ezra.

“Your grandfather called you George,” said he, shrewdly.

“Because of a mistake,” said Ezra, his face flushed as he called to mind the fact that the mistake was not corrected.

The soldier of fortune seemed to divine this feeling; he slapped Ezra upon the back.

“No,” said he, “never be ashamed that you did not undeceive him. What you did was for the best.” Then, with another look at George, “I scarcely blame the old gentleman for his blunder. Your brother is most marvelously like you.”

Here George said eagerly to Ezra:

“You have seen grandfather?”

“Twice while in Boston. He is well.”

“But as staunch for the King as ever?”

“Yes.”

They had left the guard and were making their way along a narrow road, the horses, under care of the Porcupine, following. Nat now spoke.

“That you have been in Boston,” said he to Ezra, “is astonishing news. But that you have slipped out again seems almost impossible.”

“Yet here we are,” smiled Ezra.

“But tell us about it,” urged Ben Cooper, his round, good-natured face full of expectancy. “We are all but gaping to hear it.”

So with that, as they walked along, Ezra related how on that April night at Charlestown, he had been seized with a desire to venture toward the “Indian’s Head.” Then how he met with the spy Pennington, and also, for the second time, with Scarlett. From the experiences at the inn, he went to the crossing of the river, the interview with his grandfather and General Gage and the long stay at the “Jolly Rover” in Ship Street. But when the latter part of the story was told, the eyes of Nat, George and Ben opened widely; the Porcupine, back with the horses, executed a caper in the road.

“An attack!” said Nat, his face all alight.

“At last!” cried George, with an involuntary tug at his belt.

“We’ll make them run as we did before,” declared Ben Cooper.

But, as was usual, Nat’s was the practical mind.

“It is good news,” said he, “and we are all glad of it. But the next move, I think, is to get it to the ears of General Ward.”

A chorus of assent followed this. In a few minutes they reached an encampment of colonists; to a gray-haired captain, a veteran of the Louisburg, Nat represented the case as far as he saw fit and asked that two mounts be loaned them.

“We haven’t horses enough for our own use,” said the captain. “But if it is, as you say, a matter of great importance, why of course you must be accommodated.”

Accordingly the nags were brought forward and saddled. Then all six, with the dwarf riding with Nat, mounted and rode off at a smart canter, heading for Cambridge and General Ward.

CHAPTER XIII—SHOWS HOW EZRA RODE WITH PRESCOTT TOWARD BUNKER HILL

As the six dashed along the morning roads toward Roxbury, Ezra noted much improvement in the American position; and those works that were in view had grown stronger and much more formidable than heretofore.

“It is right cleverly laid out,” commented Gilbert Scarlett, whose keen, dark eyes missed nothing. “I am more struck with admiration of your farmer and mechanic soldiery the more I see of them.”

“I can see,” said Nat Brewster, who rode with him, “that you have been harkening to the stories that the British have to tell about us. They call us impudent peasants who, in ignorance of what we are about, dare to face the army of the King. But that is mere bluster and affectation. Those officers among the British who have any experience in the warfare of the colonies, know that we have leaders who are perhaps their superiors.”

Scarlett smiled.

“Almost,” said he, “do you surpass our young friend Prentiss in attachment to the cause.”

“It is the cause of my country,” said Nat, simply.

A look of something like sadness came into the adventurer’s face.

“It must be a fine thing, indeed, to feel like that,” said he moodily. “As I have mentioned, I have served many causes—but never that of my own country, because I have no country.”

Nat looked at him inquiringly.

“I was born in Lisbon, of an English mother and an Italian father,” said Scarlett, “and in my childhood, you might say the world was my cradle. My father followed the wars and my mother

followed him. And when they died, I took up their task of wandering. This sword," and his hand rested upon the heavy hilt, "was my father's, and I have carried it from Muscovy to the Floridas; and it has profited me no more than the cloth you see upon my back."

"You have lived and fought in old countries, or among old peoples," spoke Nat, eagerly. "But here is a new land, a new people. In the years to come, by the righteousness of our cause and the strength of our arms, we'll stand free and alone. Make this your country. Draw your blade for it. And when all is done, it will not forget you."

Scarlett's eyes sparkled; he looked at Nat with admiration.

"That's well spoken," said he, "and you all but persuade me. But," and he shook his head, "I have seen uprisings of people before. I have seen them suffer under burdens imposed upon them by their masters until they could bear it no more; then they threw it off and struck out madly, blindly at their tormentors. But always they were beaten down. They were untaught in war; they had no skilled leaders to show them the way to point out the foe's weaknesses, to direct their strength. If I expect to see this repeated now it will not surprise you, surely."

"When you come to know us," smiled Nat, "you'll know us better."

As they entered Cambridge they encountered Colonel Stark, with his powerful face and fearless bearing. Ezra saluted and stopped him, and as they conversed at some distance, Scarlett said:

"Who is that?"

"It is Colonel Stark, of New Hampshire. He has fought the French and Indians all his life and is a sample of our leaders."

"He has the front of a man who'd face terrible odds and never flinch," commented the adventurer as he regarded Stark narrowly. "Yes, I like your Colonel Stark; but I will require to see the others before I change my mind."

Ezra saluted the New Hampshire warrior, who then rode on. The boy returned to his comrades.

"We are again fortunate," said he. "Colonel Stark has just left General Ward and tells me that Colonel Prescott and General Putnam were then with him. If we make haste we might find them there still."

The hasty clatter of hoofs awoke no surprise in the town. Cambridge had grown accustomed to such long since. As they approached the house which the commander had made his headquarters, they saw a few sentries leaning upon their rifles, conversing carelessly.

A broad window, which faced an open sweep of green, stood open; and within, three men in blue uniforms faced with white were gathered about a table in earnest discussion.

The boys halted and dismounted; after a moment's discussion it was decided that Ezra should seek admittance to the officers' presence alone, as he could best tell of what had happened. So the others seated themselves upon the grass in full view of the window, while the young New Englander approached the sentries and announced himself. After some hesitation one of them went into the house as though to seek the commands of a superior.

Scarlett's searching eyes watched the three about the table; every movement, every lineament, so it seemed, came under his observation.

"And so these are more of your leaders," said he to Nat. "Tell me now, which of them is General Ward?"

"The one directly facing us," replied Nat, pointing to the general in command. "He is a safe leader, and that's saying the least of him. The only fault that could be charged against him is that his health is bad, which might affect his enterprise. He was once a justice of the peace; also he served with the British commander, Abercrombie, against the French and Indians. He was a lieutenant."

Scarlett plainly had no exalted opinion of General Ward as an officer; but he made no comment.

"This other, now," he said, "this thick-set man with the full red face and the whitening hair. Which is he?"

"That," said Nat, "is General Putnam. He is considered to be, and I think justly, one of the most remarkable military characters of this time. For years he led the quiet life of a country gentleman on a beautiful farm at Brooklyn in Connecticut. He was noted but for one exploit; and that was the killing of a she-wolf which had become the terror of the countryside. As no one had been able to destroy the beast, Putnam had himself lowered into its den, and shot it to death as it sprang at his throat.

"When the French invaded northern New York, he took up arms and, with the provincial army, marched to repulse them. Ten years of his life were spent in that and Indian warfare. Once he was taken at Wood Creek by the Indians, who determined to burn him, and were about applying

the torch at his feet when a French captain of the name of Molang arrived and saved his life. He won the rank of colonel in the provincial army and was with General Lyman in the West Indies, serving at the fall of Havana. After that he went back to his estate, where he remained until the alarm went out to the Sons of Liberty some two months ago."

"A right experienced officer," said Scarlett, "and like the man from New Hampshire, he has the look of one that would not be easily beaten."

At this juncture they saw Ezra admitted to the house; a moment later they saw him enter the room where the three officers sat.

"Your Colonel Prescott is the other one, of course," said the adventurer, as he regarded the stalwart, soldier-like figure of that gallant gentleman. "For what is he remarkable?"

"He, too, has seen honorable service in the provincial army. He was a captain under General Winslow. At the first call for defenders he left his estates at Pepperell and gave his service and influence to the general good. I have the opinion," continued Nat, "that this officer will conduct himself with distinction in whatever place his lot be cast."

"If we are to go by appearances, yes. However," and the soldier of fortune twirled his moustache points, "the future will raise up leaders for your country if the war continues."

While they were speaking, they had been closely watching the scene within the headquarters of the colonial commander. George, Ben and the Porcupine were also likewise engrossed.

They saw Ezra greeted with rather surprised reserve. This was to be expected, as the three officers were apparently deep in some problem that required their undivided attention. Ezra saluted, and then the watchers saw Colonel Prescott speak to him. What he said must have been kindly and encouraging, for a look of gratitude came into the boy's face.

He stood at the foot of the table. General Ward was at its head, while the other officers sat upon either side. Then the lad began to speak, and from the first sentence those outside noted a look of anticipation settle upon the listeners' faces.

PUTNAM STRUCK THE TABLE

This grew deeper and deeper; now and then General Putnam struck the table a smart blow with his right hand, his red face growing still redder. But toward the end of Ezra's story, he grew as grave as the others; and when the finish came, all arose quickly. General Ward was seen to speak, the others gestured their accord with him. Then all shook Ezra's hand warmly, after which Putnam and Prescott, followed by the lad, strode out of the room.

The horses belonging to the general and colonel were at hand when they emerged. A sentry brought them forward, and as this was being done, Ezra beckoned Gilbert Scarlett to the door of headquarters.

"This," said the boy, "is Mr. Scarlett, who was of such great assistance to me."

Both soldiers greeted the adventurer warmly.

“Sir,” said General Putnam, in his bluff, honest way, “I am glad to see you in Cambridge at such a time. For a man so ready of hand and brain as you have proved yourself, there are deeds to be done.”

“If you will accept a commission with our forces,” said Colonel Prescott, after examining the young man steadily, “I feel sure that Dr. Warren and his fellow committeemen will see to it with pleasure.”

“Gentlemen,” responded Scarlett with a flourish, “you are kind. I will not forget you. And if it should come about that I should at last take a side in this bickering that is now begun, I will give what you say serious consideration.”

As Putnam and Prescott mounted, both Scarlett and Ezra stood at salute; the officers replied to this and rode hastily off, after the manner of men who had urgent matters that required their attention.

“Well?” inquired Nat Brewster, as Ezra and the adventurer approached once more.

“As it happened,” said Ezra, cheerily, “General Ward was just outlining a plan to fortify one of the hills above or below the city, when I arrived. The matter has been under consideration in the council for some days, but some of the commanders have felt doubtful.”

“And what will now be done?” asked George, anxiously.

“A force will be sent to throw up works on Bunker Hill.”

“But,” protested Ben Cooper, “how do they know that it is Bunker Hill that the British mean to attack?”

“They don’t. But General Putnam says that they will attack any commanding place that our force seizes.”

Scarlett slapped his thigh.

“A sound military judgment,” declared he. “He is most undoubtedly right. If Bunker Hill is taken possession of, Bunker Hill will be the object of Gage’s assault. Look here.”

Then in the shadow of General Ward’s headquarters, the lads, together with the Porcupine, held consultation over a rough map which the adventurer had drawn before entering Boston.

“There will be riding to-day,” said Ezra, at length, “and the bearing of dispatches. It would be as well that we should report to Dr. Warren for any service that we can render.”

As Scarlett was not open to perform any such service until he had committed himself finally to the cause, the dwarf was sent with him to find a comfortable inn; then the four comrades rode to Dr. Warren’s house.

The patriot doctor had just received a hasty line from Prescott, more than likely written in the saddle, and was delighted at the arrival of these four active, enterprising young spirits.

“This,” said he, as he sat down to plan the work which he desired them to do, “will be a day of days. Let us hope that Providence will be kind to us and guide us to victory.”

All day the four rode up and down the countryside. And wherever they went all became activity. Arms were seen to, ammunition was gotten ready, men were set to drilling outside their camps. Volunteers, at the prospect of immediate action, flocked into the towns; mattocks, spades and other entrenching tools were sent forward in wagon-loads to Cambridge.

Orders were issued in the evening for Prescott’s, Frye’s and Bridge’s regiments, also a party of two hundred Connecticut troops to parade in the Cambridge camp, furnished with packs and blankets and with provisions for twenty-four hours. Also Captain Gridley’s company of artillery of forty-nine men and two field-pieces was commanded to parade.

However, in all the dispatch-bearing and all the activity, not a word as to what was going forward had leaked out. Captains assembled their companies and saw them equipped as directed without the faintest notion as to what was about to be attempted.

The brigade named was to make an immediate advance upon Bunker Hill under command of Colonel Prescott. Colonel Richard Gridley, the American engineer, was to bear him company with the plans of the proposed works.

Gilbert Scarlett sat his borrowed horse by the side of Ezra Prentiss and watched Prescott’s brigade mass upon Cambridge common.

“It’s true,” said he, with a hitch at his sword belt and a flush upon his face, “that I have taken no side yet in this quarrel. But I never could resist a good fight. So I’ll strike a blow for the sheer pleasure of it, even if I have no feeling in the matter.”

“I expected that,” laughed Ezra. “And when you have struck one I am sure that the second will follow.”

Dusk was beginning to settle upon that sixteenth day of June but there was light enough to play upon the rifle barrels and upon naked bayonets thrust into wide leather belts. The men were earnest-faced and determined; they bore themselves not after the style of regulated troops, but rather after that of men who were about to face the power of tyranny and attempt to break it once and for all. As he looked at them, admiration came into the face of the adventurer.

“Here,” said he to Ezra, “we have fellows that have the power and the will to fight. The King’s troops will have no rabble to disperse, as I’ve more than once heard they’ve expected.”

With the officers at their heads, the brigade stood with heads bowed, resting upon their grounded rifles. A white-haired man, venerable and dignified, advanced before them, his hand upraised.

“Who is that?” whispered Ben Cooper, much impressed.

“It is President Langdon of Harvard College,” replied Ezra Prentiss. “Hush-h-h!” as Ben was about to speak once more.

Amid dead silence the venerable scholar began a fervent and impressive prayer. He prayed that heaven would watch over the little army and bring it to victory over the forces of evil, that morning should dawn upon it, strong for the fight and that it would hold out in the face of discouragements and dangers.

When everything was ready it was about nine o’clock; the command was formed into column and the advance began. Masked lights were borne in front by Ezra Prentiss and his friends; the carts containing the entrenching tools rumbled along in the rear.

At Charlestown Neck the detachment was halted, and the officers and men were informed as to the nature of the venture. Captain Nutting and his company, together with a party of Connecticut troops, were here ordered by Prescott to proceed to the lower end of the town as a guard. Here, also, General Putnam dashed up, accompanied by Major Brooks, and joined the main body.

Once more the party was put into motion; but at the foot of Bunker Hill it again came to a halt. Colonel Prescott called his officers about him and they plunged into an earnest debate. The dim light of the lanterns held by the boys lit up the earnest faces of the officers as they talked.

“The orders for us to occupy Bunker Hill are most explicit,” said Prescott after a time. “And yet it would seem to me——”

He paused and his bold gaze went toward the hill nearest Boston, which bulked upward in a dense swell through the night.

“The nearer the enemy, the quicker we come to hard gripes with him,” declared the rough and ready Putnam.

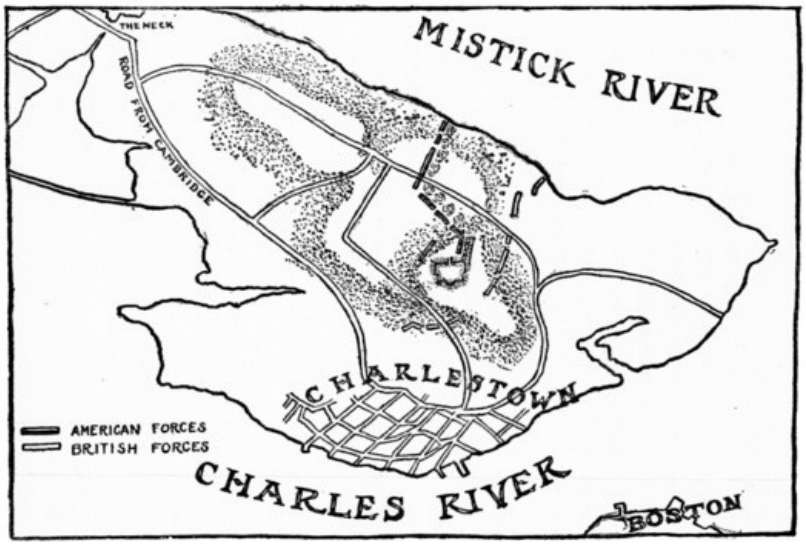
The other officers were for the most part silent; those who did speak were non-committal. It was plain to be seen that they had no desire to go contrary to General Ward’s orders unless some one else assumed the responsibility.

“If we had a map of the section,” spoke Prescott, “I think I could show you all the weak points in our orders.”

In a moment Ezra Prentiss stood forward and saluted. Prescott signed to him to speak.

“Mr. Scarlett has such a map,” he said. “I saw it only to-day.”

Instantly the drawing was demanded.



GILBERT SCARLETT'S MAP, AS REVISED BY HIM AFTER THE BATTLE

Scarlett stepped within the circle, coolly took it from his pocket, and proceeded to explain its design. The officers listened with great attention and examined the map closely.

"Orders to a soldier," stated Scarlett wisely, "should be as the breath to his nostrils. But," and he elevated his brows, "plans made in the camp are sometimes necessarily modified in the field."

Putnam looked at Prescott and that gentleman smiled.

"That Breed's Hill," continued Scarlett pointing to his map, "is nearest the enemy is the point of view of a fighting commander. Two more things are to be considered in its favor. Occupy it and you face your foe as he comes up the slope from the water; also by so doing you deprive him of a point where he can plant his batteries."

Putnam threw back his head and laughed.

"Could anything be better said?" demanded he. "The gentleman makes it all point. There is nothing else to do that I can see," with an inquiring look at his fellows, "but to shift from Bunker to Breed's and make our fight there."

Colonel Prescott and Colonel Gridley at once gave the same as their opinions; and after a few minor objections, the remainder also gave their consent.

Again the troops were put in motion; and this time they were not to halt until they had reached a spot for the possession of which they were to fight a battle, the story of which will live while the nation holds her place among her sisters of the earth.

CHAPTER XIV—IN WHICH IS FOUGHT THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL

Bunker Hill, at the time of the siege of Boston, was a familiar place, but Breed's Hill was not so well known.

The surface of the latter was divided into tracts used as pastures; and these were called after their separate owners. There was Russell's pasture, and Breed's pasture, further south, while Green's was at the head of what is now Green Street.

The east and west sides of the hill were very steep. At the east base were brick kilns, clay pits and much marshland.

At the top of Breed's Hill the men, at the command of their officers, threw down their packs, stacked arms and stood ready. In the dim light of the masked lanterns held by Ezra and his comrades, Colonel Gridley marked out the lines of the works; the tool carts came up, the tools were distributed and the men set to work. And as this began, Colonel Prescott ordered a guard, under Captain Maxwell of his own regiment, to patrol the shore of the lower part of the town near the old ferry.

"We must know what the enemy is about," Ezra heard the colonel say to Colonel Gridley. "His movements are most interesting to us to-night."

So near were they to the sentry-belted town of Boston that they could hear, now and then, the cry of the guard at Copp's Hill battery. Also the sounds from the war-ships were carried to them on the quiet wind.

"Their vessels command our position very well," said Colonel Gridley, as they stood looking out across the starlit waters. "That is the 'Falcon,' there off Moulton's Point. The 'Somerset' is at the

ferry, and that ship near to Craigie's Bridge is the 'Glasgow.' The 'Cerberus' and some floating batteries are yonder where you see that tangle of lights."

"It will be a surprise to me if our work is not suspected before daylight," said Prescott. "However, the men are accustomed to handling their tools, and may carry it through unnoticed."

And that is what happened. Diligently the thousand patriots cut into the earth. Perfect silence was maintained; and every little while the assuring cry that "All's well" came from Maxwell's patrol down along the water's edge.

When dawn finally broke on that seventeenth of June, the works were about six feet in height, and the men were still laboring away on them with a will. The entrenchments were first discovered by the watch upon the twenty-gun vessel "Lively." Captain Bishop, her commander, did not wait for orders, but put a spring in her cable and at once opened fire.

The roar of the "Lively's" guns awoke the British camp, and soon all Boston was assembled, staring in wonderment at the fortifications which a night had caused to arise upon Breed's Hill.

A little later a battery of six guns at Copp's Hill took up the firing, and soon the heavier vessels joined in.

A cannon-shot finally killed a man laboring on the platforms behind the breastworks. At once the faces of his comrades went pale at the sight; but Colonel Prescott, who happened to be close at hand, stepped upon the parapet and leisurely paced around, examining it and speaking to the officers. Noticing his intentions, Ezra Prentiss and Nat Brewster, who were with him, awaiting his commands, did likewise. And seeing these three calmly ignoring the British fire, the raw soldiers took heart; indeed a little later they took to greeting each shot with shouts of derision.

The sun came well up and the heat became oppressive. Some of the men, unaccustomed to warfare, had neglected to bring provisions, as ordered. Suffering for want of food and drink, they began to murmur.

Some of the officers became alarmed.

"We had better send word to General Ward at once, to relieve them with other troops," said he. "In a little while they will be beyond control."

"I will never consent to these men being relieved," said Prescott, promptly. "They have raised the works and are the best able to defend them. They have suffered the labor, so let them have the honor of the fight."

Ezra stood with Ben and George a little later upon the slope of the hill nearest the water; he had been gazing across toward the city, and finally said:

"There seems to be some sort of a movement in Boston. Governor Gage has probably thought it high time to act."

In this he was correct. Gage, after a council of war, in which his plans had been objected to by General Clinton, had finally issued the orders that brought the climax of the day. Artillery was wheeled into array, foot-soldiers and dragoons paraded in all the bravery of their uniforms and colors.

Ten companies of British grenadiers and light infantry and the Fifth and Thirty-eighth regiments, with ammunition and supplies, were ordered to the Long Wharf. The Fifty-second and Forty-third regiments, together with the remaining companies of grenadiers and light infantry, were ordered to the North Battery. Other troops were held in readiness to march at a moment's notice.

At the earnest request of his officers, Colonel Prescott dispatched Major Brooks to Cambridge to General Ward for reinforcements. This officer reached headquarters about ten o'clock, and after much discussion, the regiments of Colonel Stark and Colonel Reed, both of New Hampshire, were sent to the aid of those upon the hill.

When, at last, the men at work upon the fortifications were exhausted by the toil and the heat, General Putnam had a large force of men gather up the tools, fall back with them to Bunker Hill and there begin a second line of works.

"We don't expect to be beaten," said that seasoned officer, "but in a battle no one knows just what will happen; so it's best to have something to fall back on."

It was about twelve o'clock noon, when Ezra Prentiss' keen eyes detected the first of the British march to the boats.

"Here they come," he shouted to Ben Cooper, who was some little distance away. "We'll need the rifles now."

All of them, the Porcupine included, carried rifles strapped upon their backs; and their pouches were stuffed with ammunition. So now they proceeded to get them ready. Locks were examined; old charges were withdrawn and fresh ones rammed down. With Prescott's permission they

selected stations at the end of a line of riflemen whose position promised at least a fair share of action.

The Porcupine, as he stood leaning upon his rifle, the barrel of which towered above his head, excited much laughter among the men. But he grinned good-naturedly and smoothed down his stiff crest of hair.

“Laugh away,” said he, “if it’ll do you any good. I don’t mind it. But remember, it won’t take inches to shoot straight. You’ll find the British dodging the bullets I send them, as nimbly as they do those of the tallest of you.”

A laugh and the clapping of hands down the line greeted this.

“Truly spoken,” said a huge farmer-like fellow who had performed prodigies in the entrenching, “and aptly said, too. Pointed properly, his bullet will lift a lieutenant-general out of his saddle, and more than that you can’t say for any of us.”

As the British began preparing to embark, two more ships of war moved up the Charles River to join the others in firing upon the American works. The roar of the cannonade was tremendous; the yellow smoke at times almost obscured the sun. The “Falcon” and “Lively” were sweeping the low ground at the foot of Breed’s Hill to dislodge parties that might have been sent by Prescott to prevent a landing. And as General Howe, who was in command of the attack, with Brigadier-General Pigot under him, embarked, the “Glasgow” frigate and “Symmetry” transport began raking Charlestown Neck to prevent the crossing of any further American reinforcements.

As the signal, the hoisting of a blue flag, was given, the British host began to advance across the river, their artillery in the leading barges. A breeze drove the smoke to the northward, and the lads, as they stood in the redoubt, had a clear view of the crossing. And Ezra, as he looked, drew in a deep breath.

“If splendor of appearance ever wins battles, surely this detachment will be the winner today,” he said.

“But it never does,” said Gilbert Scarlett, a rifle in the hollow of his arm. “Accurate firing, steadiness and the resolve to stick to it until the very last shot, is what brings victory.”

The brilliant scarlet coats, the white cross belts, the gleam of the rifle barrels and brass guns formed a most dazzling and impressive sight. And the boats came with the regularity of machinery; the heavy frigates and brisker gunboats covered their advance with a continuous thunder of guns.

The Americans did little to halt the British progress. The time for action, as their wise commanders had decided, had not yet arrived.

“And they are right,” commented Gilbert Scarlett. “Our cannon are few and of light weight, and to fire on the shipping would be waste of powder.” Even the troop-barges, he pointed out, were difficult to hit, up to the moment of their landing.

This latter occurred just one hour after the start, and Moulton’s Point was the place selected. Not a shot was fired at the British force as they left their boats, and they immediately formed in orderly array. There was a long halt. General Howe, after examining the American works, seemed to think very well of them, for he at once sent back across the river a demand for reinforcements. And while these were being sent the British officers, with the nonchalance that experience brings, very quietly dined.

Prescott and Putnam and their force lay stubbornly behind the earthworks waiting for the foe to make the first move. But beyond, at Cambridge, all was excitement and uproar. Bells clashed and swung in the church towers, drums beat to arms, and guns roared their warning that the British had crossed in force.

There was no need now for General Ward to withhold the regiments still under his command; all along he had been afraid to send too many men to Breed’s Hill, thinking that the attack might be leveled at Cambridge. Now he reserved but Patterson’s, Gardener’s and part of Bridge’s regiments to protect the town; the remainder of the Massachusetts force and what was left of Putnam’s Connecticut men were hurried forward to the point of attack.

Dr. Warren appeared at the earthworks at this time and was greeted with cheers. The men were exhausted and hungry, and for a time had been inclined to suspect the good faith of their officers. But now with such men as Warren, Putnam, Prescott and, later, General Pomeroy, plain in their sight, they were quiet and patient enough.

At about two o’clock the British began a movement along the Mystic River with the intention of flanking the Americans and surrounding the redoubt. Putnam at once ordered two pieces of artillery, and Captain Knowlton with the Connecticut troops, to leave the entrenchments, descend the hill and oppose the enemy’s right wing.

While Knowlton was carrying out this command, Colonel Stark with his New Hampshire men

began the crossing of Charlestown Neck. The guns of the “Glasgow” were trained upon them; shells screamed through the air; solid shot ripped great seams in the earth.

In the heart of the regiment a single drum tapped with regular beat; the men marched to this calmly, their long rifles over their shoulders. Now and then a shot tore through them, but they never hurried their pace.

Stark’s grim face was set like stone; it seemed as though he scarcely cast a look at the thundering ship of war. The command continued to swing slowly along to the tap of the drum. When part way over Captain Dearborn spoke to the colonel apprehensively:

“We are moving very slowly. Wouldn’t it be well to sound the double quick?”

But the heroic Stark replied, quietly:

“They are moving fast enough for men going into action. In a fight, one fresh man is as good as a dozen tired ones.”

These troops, with Captain Knowlton’s, took possession of a rail fence at the foot of Bunker Hill; and they set about extending it by throwing up a stone wall on the beach. Later Colonel Reed’s force joined those of Connecticut and New Hampshire.

When Howe’s reinforcements arrived, the British commander addressed his army, now of about three thousand men; then he gave the order to advance against the colonial force. At the same time a signal was given and the frigates, the floating batteries and that upon Copp’s Hill, all centred their fire upon the fortifications. At the same time other British batteries in Boston began to throw shells into Roxbury in an effort to burn that town.

The British advanced under cover of this terrific fire. The American artillery was but feeble and soon silenced. General Howe moved with his right wing, with which he hoped to burst through the Connecticut and New Hampshire men at the rail fence: General Pigot came on with the left, which aimed to storm the redoubt. At this point the attacking force found that twelve-pound shot had been sent to load six-pounder guns. Howe was all but frantic with rage; but he ordered that the pieces be charged with grape and that the force continue to push on.

The miry ground, the tall grass, the heat and their heavy equipment burdened the British rank and file; but they regarded victory as assured; they felt nothing but contempt, in spite of Concord Bridge, for the “peasants” who so stubbornly faced them.

Coolly the Americans awaited.

“Hold your fire,” commanded Prescott, “until they are within ten rods—and then wait for the word.”

“Powder is scarce,” cried General Putnam. “Don’t waste a charge.”

“Aim low,” directed Dr. Warren. “Then you can’t miss them.”

“Wait till you see the whites of their eyes!”

“Through the middle of their red coats!” advised a rifleman, to whom, so it seemed, the white cross belts upon the scarlet coats offered a splendid target.

Pigot’s command advanced nearer and nearer; the fire of the shipping ceased altogether, for the British were so close that sharp eyes in the American lines could pick out individuals. Nat Brewster pointed out a body of marines.

“There is our old friend, Major Pitcairn,” said he to George Prentiss.

Both Nat and George had had rather an intimate acquaintance with that gallant and humane British officer, just previous to the Lexington fight.

“He is as smooth and unruffled as ever,” laughed George, “and his men move like clockwork.”

As the redcoats came on, a scattering fire began at some points.

“Wait for the word,” shouted Prescott. And Ezra, Scarlett and Nat Brewster leaped upon the parapet and ran along, kicking up the leveled pieces. “Hold your fire, men.”

The British, as they advanced, had kept up a continuous fire; and this made it all the more difficult for the Americans to restrain themselves. However, they had not long to wait.

Step by step the brilliant array of British swung nearer. The sun sparkled upon their lines of rifle barrels; their faces were hard and scornful; the metal upon their harness shone like gold.

With an almost mystic sense of time Prescott caught the right moment. Sharp, clear, ringing, his voice went up:

“Fire!”

Along the redoubt, and the full length of the breastwork, there was a level line of darting flame: like a shock of thunder the crash followed.

“Again!” rang the voice of Prescott as one line of his riflemen gave place to another. “Fire!”

Once more the flame points sprang outward; once more the crash followed; once more the bullets poured into the British.

The latter received the leaden hail with all the stoicism of the veterans that they were. Briskly they came on, sharply they answered, their ranks melting like wax all the time. But even they could not long face that awful rain; suddenly they wavered, furiously General Pigot sounded a retreat, and as the foe fell back a thunderous cheer went up from the colonials, behind the works.

“Good firing,” commented Gilbert Scarlett, as he looked to his smoking rifle. “These countrymen of yours,” he continued to Ezra, “need disciplining—yes; but no one need teach them how to shoot.”

While this was happening, the line of Stark and Knowlton at the rail fence was grimly facing Howe and his oncoming force. The frightful rifle fire littered the ground with the British veterans; they broke and fled in disorder.

When this was seen from the redoubt, a tempest of cheers went up. Ezra made out in the thick of the retreat the fine figure of General Howe, as that gallant officer strove with his men, trying to get them into some semblance of order.

“See,” said the boy, pointing, “he’s bringing them into shape. I have heard that this General Howe is a very able officer; and his men seem to believe in him.”

“His second attack will be warmer, I think,” said Nat Brewster. “He’ll know what to expect, and will no doubt make his plans accordingly.”

They watched, as did the entire American force, the reassembling of the British. And while this was going on the battery at Copp’s Hill began to throw shells into Charlestown; also a party of marines landed upon its easterly side from the “Somerset” to fire the town.

Suddenly Ben Cooper cried out:

“Look there!”

A pall of smoke was rising above the town; then a fierce burst of flame ascended.

“They have fired Charlestown,” said George Prentiss, his face paling. “They think to frighten us. But it will take more than that.”

The buildings were mainly of wood and the fire swept among them, swirling and devouring; huge, far-reaching tongues of red flame curled outward across the streets, from structure to structure, licking them up and leaving nothing but ashes behind.

In the midst of this terrifying disaster, General Howe ordered his second attack on the rail fence. This time his artillery got fairly into service; his men, as before, fired as they advanced.

The American officers, grown confident, cried out:

“Reserve your fire. Let them come within three rods!”

This command was followed. When the time once more arrived the American rifles spat their messengers of death at the enemy. Whole ranks of the British seemed to fall. In the midst of death General Howe cheered on his soldiers. Two of his aides were shot down while receiving his orders.

In the face of swift-coming death the soldiery faltered. The British officers were seen to strike some of them with their swords, urging them on. But it was no use. Again they gave way, this time rushing to their boats and leaping in as though frantic with the fear of it all.

The flames roared and the smoke billowed over Charlestown. At the foot of Breed’s Hill, the brilliant red-coated and white cross belted men huddled and massed in seemingly hopeless confusion. The sun glinted upon their tall brass-fronted hats, their musket barrels threw off countless dancing reflections. Their officers raved among them in efforts to reform them; swords were drawn, and pistols were presented at the heads of the more stubborn.

Because of this panic among the British and because Howe was communicating with the Boston shore, the third attack was delayed. The Americans were thankful for this, and spent the time trying to bring up the further reinforcements sent to them. It was also discovered about this time that the ammunition was all but exhausted.

George Prentiss and Ben Cooper, mounted upon swift horses, were sent to bear this news to General Putnam, who had gone back to bring up the new men.

“Tell him to send us some powder, or we are lost,” was Prescott’s last and secret word with them.

When the two had raced furiously away, some artillery cartridges were pointed out by Gilbert Scarlett.

“Broken open, they would supply quite a few charges for the small arms,” he suggested. “I saw the like done at a small engagement in which I took part in Egypt.”

This was eagerly seized upon; but the quantity secured was pitifully small.

“Don’t waste a grain of it,” cautioned Colonel Prescott. “Send every bullet to its mark.”

But that their officers feared for the result of the day was hidden from the men. Both Prescott and Dr. Warren walked constantly up and down the parapet, talking cheerily with the defenders, and advising them how to meet any fresh onset.

“You have beaten them twice,” cried General Warren, for that was the rank he now held. “Do it once more; and it will be the last.”

While this was going on at the top of the hill, Howe was still raging at its foot.

“I’ll conquer the rascals, or die trying,” he declared repeatedly.

A reinforcement of four hundred marines had reached him from the fleet. Also he had a distinguished volunteer in the person of his close friend, the very able General Clinton. The latter had twice seen Howe discomfited; so he threw himself into a boat at Copp’s Hill and crossed to offer his services.

But some of the British officers strongly advised against another attack.

“It will be little less than butchery to lead the men upon that position again,” they said.

But Howe thought otherwise. He sternly commanded that the men be put into a soldier-like formation; then with the crafty help of Clinton, he began to plan the third attack.

The British commander had, by this time, learned to respect the colonials.

“They told me that I had a rabble of peasants to fight,” said he to Clinton. “If it’s so, then there are the makings of fine troops among those villains on the hill.”

In the forming of his last attack Howe had no doubt the sound advice of General Clinton; for it was better thought out and delivered with more wisdom than the others.

The rank and file were now commanded to lay aside their heavy knapsacks. They had been burdened with these and other useless pieces of equipment during the entire afternoon, and this, perhaps, had had its effect in breaking their courage. Then they were formed into columns.

“Rely upon the steel,” Howe commanded them. “Reserve your fire until you get within a dozen paces of them. They shall see that we, too, can fight after that fashion.”

This attack was directed upon the redoubt above; only a sham advance was made against the rail fence, in order that Stark and Knowlton’s men be forced to hold their position, and so not be able to come to the aid of Prescott’s. Also the British artillery was now supplied with proper shot, and was wheeled forward to rake the breastworks.

As the British came on, Ezra Prentiss regarded their compact columns with an anxious eye. He had had but little experience in warfare; but something told him that there was a task coming much more formidable than what had gone before.

“It looks,” said he to Nat and Scarlett, “as though this would be the test, somehow. This attack seems more deftly directed.”

Gilbert Scarlett’s black eyes were sparkling with anticipation.

“Our friend, my Lord Howe, is increasing in wisdom as the day advances,” he said. “As you say, it will be a test. If we can hold the breastworks against that,” and he pointed to the King’s artillery being pushed into its last murderous position, “we will beat them again. If not, we are at the end of the fight, and can only hope for a safe retreat.”

On came the steady, sullen, silent columns. Some of the American riflemen had but one charge of powder; and this was poured in with deadly effect as the word was given. The grenadiers and light infantry shook under the shock, but came on at the urging of their officers. In a little while the left columns under Clinton and Pigot reached a position under the walls of the redoubt where they were sheltered from the scattering and feeble fire of the defenders. Then they deployed and with a rush the first flank had gained the parapet. A leaden hail; the last concentrated volley of the colonists swept this into eternity.

But on came the second rank of redcoats over the works with leveled bayonets; the Americans

met them with clubbed rifles and the few bayonets that they possessed. Stones flew through the air, hurled by desperate hands; rifle barrel rang against sword and bayonet. Desperately the colonists strove; but at this style of fighting they could not hope to hold their ground against the trained troops of Lord Howe. Step by step, Prescott saw them beaten back; their ranks were thinning fast, and hope was past; so with mercy in his heart, the gallant leader sounded a retreat.

So great was the dust thrown up by the rushing feet of the contending forces that the retreating Americans had difficulty in locating the outlets in the redoubt. Some leaped over its top; the majority fought their way grimly through the British, leaving a track of killed and desperately hurt behind them. Colonel Prescott was among the last to leave. He parried countless bayonet thrusts with his heavy sword and his waistcoat was pierced more than once.

As the Americans fled from the works, General Warren threw himself desperately among them. He knew that unless the riflemen were stayed the retreat would become a rout. And it was here that this gallant gentleman met his heroic death. The British took possession of the redoubt with shouts of victory; with the instinct of trained troops they formed and poured a murderous volley into the Americans. Warren was seen to stagger and fall before this; and the rushing mass of his countrymen passed by and left him upon the field.

“I guess it’s all over, boys,” panted Nat Brewster. “We’d best make our way back with the others.”

But at this point, when destruction seemed hovering over the flying Americans, Putnam succeeded in at last bringing up the reinforcements. Between Bunker and Breed’s Hills parts of the regiments of Ward, Gardener and Gerrish poured a continuous fire upon the enemy as they rushed forward in pursuit, and so checked them. Then the New Hampshire and Connecticut men at the rail fence, who had defended their position like heroes, saw that Prescott’s men were in retreat. So with that they gave back like veteran troops, compelling their foes to keep their distance, and soon the entire American force, with their foemen held well in hand, were bearing back over Bunker Hill.

It was at the brow of this eminence that Putnam rode up upon a foaming horse, his face shining like that of a son of battle. He had labored with the strength of a score of leaders upon the works here, but they were still unfinished. However, that never once caused his bold heart to falter.

“Make a stand here!” he shouted. “We can stop them yet! One shot more, men! One shot more!”

But the retreat was not to be stopped; the Americans had not yet been hardened to the desperate fighting in the face of defeat that comes to seasoned soldiery. And many of them had no more powder. And so they passed over the hill and across Charlestown Neck amid the fire of the British shipping and batteries.

Then, with great parade, the British crossed the Neck and took possession of the hill that they had, only a few months before, staggered down in the retreat from Concord. But they dared go no further; upon Winter and Prospect Hills, and from Cambridge a desperate, smoke-blackened army of patriots faced them, once more supplied with ammunition and with the resolution to stand and fight until the sun set and rose again.

Ezra Prentiss, weary and covered with dust, cleaned his befouled rifle and sighed.

“And, after all, it was a victory for the British,” he said.

But Scarlett, who sat at his side, likewise occupied, laughed grimly, and cast a look at the orderly but depleted array of the enemy.

“It was a victory for them—yes,” said he, with the wisdom of experience. “But another such victory would be fatal to General Gage. You have been beaten, but you have struck him a vital blow.”

CHAPTER XV—SHOWS HOW EZRA CARRIED THE NEWS OF THE BATTLE, AND HOW HE MET GENERAL WASHINGTON BY THE WAY

After the desperate struggle upon Breed’s Hill the two armies lay upon their different eminences, breathlessly regarding each other; they still held their arms ready, for they each dreaded what the other might do; but there was no movement to continue the battle upon either side; and so the last hours of daylight wore on.

Ezra Prentiss and Nat Brewster were with Colonel Prescott almost all the time since the retreat had ceased. Their hearts were heavy when they learned of Dr. Warren’s death; for where would such another be found as he? That there were other great men in the colonies, they knew well; but none were quite so human, so entirely unselfish, so absolutely devoted to the public good as this patriot who still lay upon the hillside, his face turned to the sky.

They sat upon a settle in the wide hall of the house in which Prescott made his headquarters, and talked the sad news over in mournful undertones. Through an open doorway they could see the

colonel pacing up and down, his face darkened with anger, his lips pressed tightly together.

“The result seems to set heavily upon him,” said Nat, at length. “See how his hands are clenched; and he has not even brushed the dust of the fight from his clothes.”

Ezra looked at the colonel’s lowered head and burning eyes.

“I have no doubt,” said the young New Englander, “that there is nothing in the world that he would welcome so much as a renewal of the engagement. He had the battle won, but for the lack of powder and the reinforcements that were so delayed and confused.”

They continued to talk in low tones for a time; then suddenly Colonel Prescott’s tramping ceased. He had paused in the centre of the room, and as the boys’ eyes went to him once more, they found that he was looking toward them.

“Prentiss,” said the colonel, with the manner of one who had finally made up his mind to something, “ask them to bring me my horse.”

Ezra saluted, and went quickly out. A few moments later the clatter of hoofs sounded upon the pavement, and Prescott, as he snatched up his hat, gestured Nat to follow.

Not only was Colonel Prescott’s mount awaiting him, but a little behind it stood the raw-boned black which Nat Brewster had ridden ever since leaving Philadelphia the fall before. Beside this again was a hardy looking, flea-bitten gray of visible quality which Ezra had bought of a horse dealer in the camp to replace the tall bay which, for all he knew, still stood in the barn at the “Indian’s Head.”

All three mounted, and Prescott headed at once for General Ward’s headquarters. The sun had but a short time to keep its rim above the west; indeed, in sheltered places, the shadows had grown long and were thickening into dusk.

The colonel was admitted at once to the general’s presence; and the boys remained in an anteroom, which was crowded with officers and persons of consequence, all eager to hear the news of what was to be done on the morrow.

General Ward’s room was also thronged, and business was being dispatched hurriedly. The hangings of the doorway were drawn because of the heat of the evening, and all that was said and done was plain to those in the anteroom. A light breeze was blowing through the house; and some lights, already burning in tall silver candlesticks, leaped agitatedly, throwing quavering shadows upon the stern faces of the fighting-men gathered about.

With one accord, all fell back from the table at which General Ward sat, upon the appearance of Colonel Prescott. As the commander of the force at the summit of the hill, they at once gave him place.

“General,” and Colonel Prescott saluted grimly, “I have come to make my report upon the engagement fought to-day in the neighborhood of Charlestown.”

He placed a closely written paper upon the table as he spoke, and then stood back a pace.

General Ward took up the paper and sat running his thumb and forefinger along its folds; but he did not open it.

“What has happened,” said he, “is of course already known to me. All who witnessed your work to-day join in praising it; it seems the universal opinion that no man could have done more. If you were driven from your position——”

Colonel Prescott’s hand went up and his flashing eyes swept the room.

“If I lost my position,” said he, “it was not because my men and I were not willing to hold it to the last. It was because of the neglect of some whose duty it was to lend me help. Another thing,” and he advanced to the table, his hand falling upon it with force, “give me fifteen hundred men to-night, with powder and ball and bayonets, and I will have recovered Breed’s Hill for you by sunrise to-morrow.”

A thrill ran through Ezra at these words. There was no doubting but that the aroused man meant them and stood ready to carry them out. But General Ward was too conservative a soldier to harken to any such daring plan.

“The risk would be too great,” said he. “We must not waste our strength. To-day we have lost above four hundred men. If Howe were to order an advance we could scarcely hope to hold him in check.”

“He has lost three times as many as we,” returned Prescott; “and we need have no fear of his attacking us again, just yet.”

Then some one else broke in, and the conversation in a moment became almost general. Plans were suggested and debated; the raising of men, money and ammunition engrossed every one.

When Colonel Prescott was leaving, General Ward arose, shook his hand warmly and thanked him for his services in the name of the colonies. Coming with him to the door of the anteroom his eyes fell upon Ezra and Nat, and his face lighted up.

“Here are the very lads,” said he. “I had all but forgotten that I required the service of some ready riders, and at once.”

The two boys stood forward and saluted.

“There is a dispatch, all ready,” said General Ward to Prescott, “for the Congress at Philadelphia, giving a brief account of to-day’s engagement. If you can spare these lads, and if they are not too weary with their work of to-day,” with a smile at the two, “there are none that I would rather send upon the mission.”

Prescott turned and looked at Ezra and Nat; their eager looks caused a smile to appear upon his stern face.

“They will carry the dispatch,” he said, briefly.

“I shall require it to go to-night,” said the general to the lads.

He was a thoughtful man; knowing that they had been in the thick of the fight, he hesitated about burdening them with this long journey without their having had a chance to rest.

“Our horses are at the door,” said Ezra, promptly. “We are ready to go at once.”

So they remained after Colonel Prescott had departed. Soon the dispatch of the colonial commander was placed in Ezra’s hands; their instructions were brief; then they mounted and rode swiftly away upon their journey through the deepening dusk.

“We should sleep at Framingham to-night,” said Ezra.

“We made the complete journey once in seven days,” answered Nat. “And this time we should not be behind that.”

A farmhouse was their first halt; and the good people were eager to do all they could for them when they heard who they were. It was the same through all of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Innkeepers gave them their best attention; hostlers looked to their horses with unexampled solicitude; the townspeople gathered about them burning to hear the news from the lips of the lads who had been in the battle.

They reached New York, where they attracted great attention, crowds thronging the streets to watch their progress; then they crossed the Hudson and began pushing their way across the level Jerseys. They had gone a half day’s ride over the sandy roads; it was a little past noon when they came to a fine, old, tree-shaded house, with broad fields, green with the spring’s planting, beautiful orchards and a generally prosperous look.

“Now this,” spoke Nat, good-humoredly, “is a likely sort of place for two wayfarers to alight and beseech entertainment. The people who live here could provide good food and in plenty, if appearances go for anything.”

They dismounted at the open gate and tied their horses to the fence. A small dog, hearing their footsteps upon the path, ran toward them with a great ado of barking; this brought forward a very small boy, who stood before them, his freckled face turned up inquiringly.

“Do you want my father?” asked he.

Ezra smiled down at the child.

“Perhaps so,” said he. “Is this your father’s place?”

The boy swept a small hand to all four points of the compass.

“All of it,” answered he. Then confidentially, “And he’s going to get more.”

“Good for him,” laughed Nat, “and so now run off and ask him if he can see two riders who are on their way to Philadelphia.”

The child pursed up his mouth.

“He is engaged,” spoke he, wisely. “Some gentlemen stopped a while ago. They are having dinner, and one of them is a general.”

The young continentals looked at one another.

“What’s his name?” inquired Ezra.

“General Wash’ton,” answered the child promptly.

Again the lads' eyes sought each other in mute question; and a thrill ran through them both. They recalled the tall, athletic Virginian who had sat his horse so well in Philadelphia's streets; they remembered the calm, handsome face, so highly bred and yet so powerful; they recalled the outspoken admiration of the citizens, the great esteem of his fellow members of the First Congress.

"Can it be," said Ezra, "that Washington of Virginia has been chosen commander-in-chief by the Continental Congress!"

"If he has," replied Nat Brewster, all excitement, "they have done excellently for the colonies. There is no nobler man in all America; and from all accounts, he is a born soldier."

The small boy disappeared into the house while they were speaking; but the small dog remained, sniffing suspiciously and occasionally growling for them to keep their distance. And while they were smiling at the self-importance of the little beast, there came a full-toned voice saying:

"I had not thought, Mr. Clark, to see so fine a farm in the Jerseys. It is splendid. And as I come from Virginia, where the plantations approach the extent of principalities, I may say that I am a judge."

There were footsteps upon the wide verandah which ran about the house; and turning in the direction of the sound, the boys saw a party of gentlemen. Nat's eyes instantly sought out the speaker, and at a glance he recognized the tall, strong frame and the lofty face.

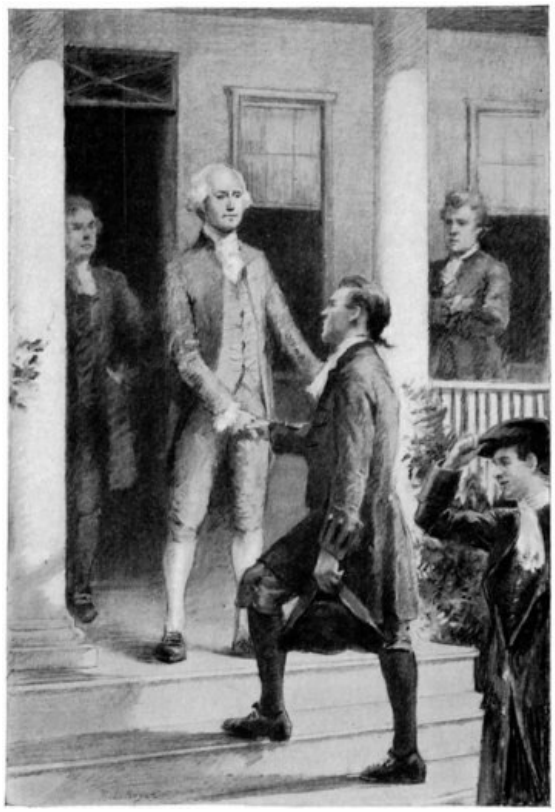
And almost at the same moment the eyes of the great Virginian caught sight of the boy.

"Hah!" cried he, taking a step forward, "here is some one I think I know, Mr. Clark."

"They are strangers to me, general," spoke the rich farmer, staring at the boys. "Travelers perhaps, young gentlemen?" addressing them.

"On our way to Philadelphia," said Ezra, as Nat stepped upon the verandah and grasped the cordially extended hand of Washington.

Nat had done Washington a splendid service just outside of Philadelphia some ten months before, and as the Virginian seldom forgot a face, and never a service, his hand grasp was warm and firm.



NAT GRASPED THE HAND OF WASHINGTON

"I am glad to see you. And so," with a look at Ezra, "you are on your way to Philadelphia?"

"Yes, general."

Washington smiled a little.

"Why," said he, "my new title seems to run before me like a forest fire. But," inquiringly, "may I ask from what direction you travel?"

“We left Cambridge in Massachusetts some five days ago,” replied Nat.

An eager light came into the eyes of the commander-in-chief.

“What news?” asked he.

“A battle has been fought,” said Nat.

Instantly the lad was encircled by a ring of anxious faces.

“And the result?” Washington’s voice was entirely without excitement.

“The British were victorious.”

A sort of groan went up from the little party of gentlemen. And it was here that Ezra Prentiss spoke eagerly.

“We are bearing General Ward’s report of the fight to Congress. And though the British did drive us back, we twice repulsed them. We would have done so the third time had not our powder run out. As it stands, they lost a thousand men and do not dare advance beyond the ground they won.”

The gloom which settled upon the face of Washington at Nat Brewster’s words vanished at those of Ezra Prentiss.

“The militia?” he asked, his hand upon the boy’s shoulder. “How did they hold themselves under fire?”

“Bravely,” returned Ezra. “As long as they could fire back they showed fear of neither cannon-shot nor musketry.”

“That is all I wish to know,” exclaimed the commander-in-chief. “The cause of liberty is safe.”

The others then burst in with anxious and excited questions. Even during the dinner which the bountiful Mr. Clark sat the boys down to in a long, shaded room did not stop this flow of interrogations. Both were forced to answer as best they could between mouthfuls, but they did so with enthusiasm, for they were as full of the matter as their questioners.

General Washington sat alone upon the verandah while the boys ate; his eyes were fixed upon the broad, fertile fields and his expression was rapt. Perhaps he saw the future, when he should retreat with a shattered army across the Jerseys, the wolf-pack of the enemy close behind him. And behind them again, the countryside in ruins!

But when the lads came out he arose.

“Mr. Clark,” said he, “you have been kind, and I thank you. And now, if you will have them bring out our horses, we will be on our way toward New York.”

The farmer sent some of his people to do as asked; then the general turned to the boys.

“I am about to send a messenger back to Philadelphia with some suggestions to Congress which this news of yours has called forth,” said he, “and if you are so inclined, the message of General Ward shall be sent by him.”

The boys hesitated a moment.

“General,” said Ezra, finally, “there is nothing that would please us better than to ride with you back to Cambridge, but——”

Washington smiled.

“If it would please you,” said he, “then you shall do it. As your officer, I direct you to turn over your dispatches to this gentleman,” indicating a young man who stood seemingly ready to depart.

Promptly Ezra drew out General Ward’s dispatch and handed it to the rider. In a few moments they saw him dashing away through the dust to the southward; and in a very few more they were heading north toward the theatre of war at the side of General Washington.

CHAPTER XVI—IN WHICH EZRA LISTENS TO A DARING PLAN, AND HOW THREE SPIES LISTEN TO IT LIKEWISE

From the time that Washington reached New York, his progress toward Cambridge was a constant ovation. In all the towns he passed through he was received by committees of citizens. Addresses of welcome and praise were read to him, cannon were fired in his honor, and escorts met him and saw him on his way.

While he was no doubt gratified by all these signs of favor and indications of the people’s

confidence, the general's most earnest desire was to reach his destination and assume the command entrusted to him. At Springfield a committee of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress met him; a cavalcade of mounted citizens and troops escorted him into Cambridge on the second of July.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the commander-in-chief entered the town. The streets were thronged with people; cheers met him upon every hand; people filled windows, sheds and roof tops to do him honor. The various colonial flags fluttered wildly; guns roared and the troops saluted their leader with critical satisfaction.

The next day General Washington assumed command of the army in due form. He at once rode about its posts and carefully examined the position of the enemy. Ezra, Nat and Gilbert Scarlett rode with the party that accompanied him, he having selected the two former as his messengers and the latter accompanying them because of his curiosity regarding the new leader.

"He looks," Scarlett told Ezra, "like a man of unmistakable parts. Colonel Prescott, last night, was good enough to sketch his life and military acts for me, and I was much struck. At Braddock's defeat he played the part, not only of a man, but of a most excellent officer."

Slowly Washington reconnoitered the British lines. He found Howe strongly entrenching on Bunker Hill, advanced about half a mile from the late battle-field, with his sentries extending fully one hundred and fifty yards upon the Cambridge side of the Neck. Three floating batteries lay in the Mystic River, and a twenty-gun ship was at anchor below the ferry. On Roxbury Neck they were also strongly fortified. The bulk of the British army lay upon Bunker Hill; only a few light horse were at this time left in Boston.

Not a point of all this seemed to escape the observing eye of the Virginian; his comments and directions were listened to by Scarlett with close attention and deepening appreciation.

The American position had grown stronger since the Bunker Hill fight.

Entrenchments had been thrown up on Prospect and Winter Hills. From these the British camp was plainly in view at little more than a mile away. There was a strong work at Sewall's Farm, which, afterward, Washington made stronger still. At Roxbury, General Thomas had thrown up a powerful fortification. The New Hampshire troops and a regiment of Rhode Island men held Winter Hill. General Putnam was in command at Prospect Hill with the greater part of his Connecticut regiments. The troops at Cambridge were all of Massachusetts Bay; and the bulk of Greene's Rhode Islanders held Sewall's Farm. Two other regiments of Putnam's men and nine regiments of Massachusetts were stationed at Roxbury. Then there were some seven hundred men scattered along the coast to prevent descents of the enemy.

In spite of all that had been done by earnest and competent men, it was scarcely an army which Washington took command of that July day. It was, rather, a gathering of armed men, for there was not much organization.

"The men are rugged, faithful and brave," said Ezra Prentiss to his friends that night as they sat at an inn called "The Honest Farmer" on the outskirts of Cambridge, toward Stark and Putnam's entrenchments. "But they are also independent and impatient of restraint."

"They elect to follow their own officers and obey no others," said Nat Brewster. "And if they are not pleased with what is going forward, whole regiments feel themselves perfectly at liberty to withdraw, wait until their views are agreed to, or return to their homes."

"General Washington will see to all that," spoke Scarlett, with a nod of the head. "I have been giving him some attention to-day and I have perceived that he is not only a man who desires order, but one who has the will to achieve his desires. From this day on things will go differently; men will obey when an order is given them; if they do not, they will find that an accounting is to be made, not to an officer who is a friend and neighbor, but to one who has only the welfare of the colonies at heart."

Ben Cooper laughed.

"The new general has been approved by you, then?" said he.

Scarlett twisted the points of his moustache.

"I am like to serve him before very long," returned he, soberly. "For, under him, this promises to become a very pretty war, indeed."

"The Honest Farmer" was a large place once frequented by farmers driving into Boston with their loads of produce. As it was cleanly kept, even in these lax and unprofitable days, it had become a favorite place of resort for young officers and citizens who liked to drop in and discuss the progress of events with them.

Upon the evening in question there was quite a throng gathered in the public room and the sound of voices filled it. Upon a bench opposite the boys sat a portly old fellow with a full, red face and a downright manner of speaking. A mild, thin-faced man sat beside him, and as they talked the

lads could not help but overhear.

“It is all very well for a parcel of men such as Adams and Hancock and their agitating like, to sit safely away in Philadelphia, and send us a stranger to take charge of us,” grumbled the portly man, in his downright way.

“But, surely,” remonstrated the thin-faced man, “you would not call General Washington a stranger.”

“He is a stranger to me, sir,” spoke the portly one, in an injured tone. “And he is from the South. Why could we not have had one of our own people? Answer me that!”

But the thin-faced man shook his head.

“Congress should know what it is about,” said he. “It must know that the general is fitted for his work, or it would not have sent him.”

“What work?” blustered the portly man, and his voice was loud and domineering. “What work, I ask you, sir?”

But the thin man again shook his head and looked blank.

“The work to be done is to drive the British out of Boston,” stated the red-faced man with the portly figure. “To drive them out of Boston so that we can go back and resume our trades and occupations. That’s what he’s sent to do. But,” and he challenged the room with both voice and eye, “how is he going to do it?”

“Faith,” laughed a gray-haired major, who stood near, “he has him there.”

But the thin-faced man unexpectedly had an answer.

“He will attack them,” he declared valiantly. “He will attack them as soon as possible.”

The portly man snorted his disgust.

“Attack them,” he repeated scornfully. “But plague on it, sir, what will he attack them with? I am no military man, but I know that he can’t move on them with his bare hands. To attack successfully,” and the stout palm of the speaker struck the bench with a resounding whack, “he must have artillery—heavy artillery.”

The thin-faced man had no reply to make to this. But the gray-haired major spoke in his stead.

“You may be no military man, as you say, sir,” said he, “but you are quite right, for all. To reach Gage in his den we must have guns that will throw great weight a long distance.”

The portly man’s red face glistened with triumph.

“Sir,” said he cordially, “it is a great satisfaction to speak to a man of understanding. You have the intelligence, apparently, to grasp a situation. And I ask you, sir, as a man of intelligence,” impressively, “where those guns are to come from?”

It was the gray-haired major who now shook his head.

“You have a faculty of asking difficult questions, I perceive, sir,” laughed he. “And that is one which I must allow to pass me by.”

More and more triumphant grew the gentleman with the red face.

“We haven’t them,” he declared loudly. “We haven’t them. And, more than that, we cannot get them.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” said a quiet voice from a bench in a corner. “Don’t be too sure of that, Mr. Trivitt. There are guns a-plenty to be had, if they will but be sought after.”

The portly Mr. Trivitt glanced toward the corner, and scorn filled his red face.

“Huh!” he grunted. “Because you served in the militia, Harry Knox, and because you went tearing about on horseback at the Bunker Hill fight, don’t think that you can teach me understanding. I was a man before you were born, and I have the sense to see what is open to my eyes.”

Harry Knox, as Mr. Trivitt called him, was a medium-sized young man, well built and with a strong, intelligent face. He laughed at the other’s words, and replied:

“But it is possible, Mr. Trivitt, that all things do not come beneath your eyes.”

To one so self-important as the portly man this was little less than an insult.

“It is a pity that you were forced by the war to give up the selling of books,” said he to Knox. “I have heard, though I’ve never read a book in my life, that you were clever in your trade. But in

the trade of a soldier you promise to be less excellent." He arose to his feet with great dignity. "However," he continued, "I never discuss matters of importance with youths. It is a waste of time and breath."

And with that the indignant Mr. Trivitt stuck his three-cornered hat upon his head and stumped out of "The Honest Farmer" much affronted.

Ezra caught the eye of Henry Knox and nodded to him. Young Prentiss had inherited his father's love of books, and had many times purchased volumes from the youthful bookseller at his shop in Boston; indeed, in the discussions that accompanied these transactions, quite an intimacy had sprung up between them.

Knox arose and approached the boys cordially. He was but twenty-five himself at this time, and had many boyish traits still.

"I am glad to see you once more," said he to Ezra, as they shook hands. "I noticed you and your friends, here," with a smile at the others, "as Prescott fell back from the hill on the day of the fight; but of course there was no time then for any exchanges, except with the enemy."

The others were made known to him; he sat down with them and began to talk over the coming of Washington and the things that were to be expected of the new commander. At length, during a lull in the conversation, Gilbert Scarlett said:

"You did but jest with your fat friend, Mr. Trivitt, I suppose, with regard to the heavy guns."

But young Knox shook his head.

"No," said he, "I spoke seriously enough. If General Washington wants heavier and more cannon than he already has, they are to be had for the journeying after them."

Seeing the look of interest upon the faces of his listeners, he continued:

"It is a simple matter enough. We have all heard of the success of Colonel Ethan Allan and young Arnold at Ticonderoga and Crown Point. Both these strongholds have been captured from the British and both are provided with heavy guns. A party, equipped with proper authority, could bring these on to Cambridge with some little effort."

"I am not acquainted with the country between here and the captured strongholds," said Gilbert Scarlett, delightedly, for the idea seemed to appeal powerfully to his imagination, "but the project is one of exceptional quality. I congratulate you, sir."

"Thank you," said Knox. "I am obliged to you. I have mentioned it to others—General Ward, for example, and he fancied it impracticable."

"I have all respect for General Ward," answered Scarlett, "but you'll pardon me if I say that he's too conservative. You'd gain a friend to your plan at once if you spoke to General Putnam or Stark, or one of their kind. A man must have a spice of daring to grasp opportunities."

After that night the boys saw a great deal of Henry Knox. Indeed, also, he gradually came to be a man of importance in the camp. For his services at Bunker Hill he was made a colonel; and a practical, enterprising officer he proved to be.

The days went on, and Washington labored with the force newly under his command. Powder continued to be a scarce article in the camp. At no time was there above nine rounds to a man, and with this slender supply, the general had to maintain a constantly extending line of posts—posts always exposed to the concentrated assaults of well-ordered veterans. But he clung grimly to the task; little by little his ideas began to be seen, order gradually arose out of confusion; his brigadiers grasped his intentions readily, and so things began to shape themselves as he wanted them.

More than twenty thousand able men were desired to carry out Washington's designs. There were only seventeen thousand enrolled; and of these less than fifteen thousand were fit for service. Recruiting was carried on throughout New England. Eloquent speakers harangued village crowds, and their highly colored words drew the young men constantly to the camp at Cambridge.

The environs of Boston at this time presented an animated sight. Fortifications were everywhere; men labored for the cause of liberty with mattock and spade; they drilled ceaselessly; whole towns, so it seemed, were given up to the military; white tents were pitched in orderly lines in the fields. Only a century before the two principal passes into Boston—Charlestown Neck and Boston Neck—had been fortified to save the town from the Indians and so preserve American civilization. Now the hills that commanded these same passes were peopled with the descendants of those who had formerly defended them and they were arrayed in the pride of war; their hands were raised against the oppressive government that should have fostered them, but which, instead, sought to crush them out.

While Washington was bringing order to his army and strengthening his position, he was also

constantly seeking to confine the operations of the enemy and cut off their supply of provisions. Attacks were carefully guarded against; parties in whale boats were afloat each night to watch the waters; the American pickets grew as keen as night-birds, so accustomed were they to search the darkness.

Sudden assaults, made by parties on both sides, marked the summer, and the fighting on the islands continued. British transports arrived from time to time, filled with additional troops; now and then the King's batteries opened fire upon an American work which they fancied was being pushed too far; on the sea, the Yankee privateers were increasing in numbers and in power; scarcely a week passed that the city did not receive news of some daring deed of theirs.

Then finally the long expected party of Southern riflemen arrived. These had enlisted at the first echo of the war and they had marched from four to seven hundred miles in their anxiety to face their country's enemies.

They were bronzed, hardy looking men, dressed in hunting-shirts and coonskin caps. They carried rifles, the length of which caused the boys to open their eyes.

"They look like marksmen," said Ezra Prentiss. "I have heard that the backwoodsmen in their colony are very expert with the rifle."

As though to prove this, a party of the Southerners passed in review before the commanders shortly after they reached the camp. While advancing quickly, and at a distance of two hundred and fifty yards, they fired at a target seven inches in diameter. And each bullet found the mark!

Washington at once ordered these riflemen stationed at the outposts. Here they made themselves terrible to the British, and day by day this terror increased. Whatever they fired at they hit; and soon the King's outposts dreaded to move except under cover. Rumors of the remarkable shooting of these men reached even so far as England; and one of them, who was made prisoner, was taken there. The newspapers described him with great minuteness; and the British public swarmed to see him and the motto "Liberty or Death" which he wore upon the breast of his hunting-shirt in common with his fellows.

Several times Washington tried to force the hand of Gage, as in his occupation of Ploughed Hill. But the British refused to accept the challenge. They bombarded the position, to be sure, and kept it up for the greater part of two weeks, but finally the firing ceased. During this summer, also, the celebrated Liberty Tree in Boston was attacked by the furious Tories and ruthlessly cut down.

October had arrived and the coming frost was felt in the night air. And as the chill grew deeper, the public room of "The Honest Farmer" grew more and more a place of resort for citizens and officers. One night the four boys had gathered there in company with Gilbert Scarlett. They sat before a slow fire of green wood, which served very well to take the discomfort out of the air, and were talking together upon topics of the time and listening to the sayings of those about them.

It seemed that "The Honest Farmer," besides being a very pleasant inn, was a great place for grumblers. And just now some citizens, gathered about an oaken table, saw fit to criticize General Washington for what they called his inaction.

"What can he mean?" demanded one. "If the British will not come out to him, he should go in to them. This state of affairs, at the present rate, will continue on forever."

"He was sent here to drive them out. Let him show that he is competent by at least attempting to do so," grumbled another.

Thus they went on; each had his say in the matter and each said it churlishly and discontentedly.

"To be a military commander," spoke Gilbert Scarlett to the boys, his booted legs stretched out to the fire, "is not to lie upon a bed of roses. Here we have a party of gentlemen who will speak their minds upon a subject upon which they have no information. They would have General Washington charge upon a strong position without powder enough to wake General Gage from his sleep. Apparently they possess rare enterprise, but their discretion is small, indeed."

While he spoke Colonel Knox entered the room; after greeting some friends he made his way directly to where the boys were sitting. He was dressed in the blue uniform faced with white which had grown so familiar in those early days of the war; his face was bronzed through exposure to the weather, and his eyes were bright and full of a newly kindled eagerness.

He shook hands with the lads; that he was a colonel and they but enlisted men made no difference in that democratic time. And after he had greeted Scarlett, who made room for him at the fire, the young colonel sat down.

"Have you noticed a tinge of frost in the air?" asked he, as he rubbed his hands briskly. "It will be a hard, cold winter, I think, when it is once upon us. It is always so when there is so early a beginning."

"It was midsummer when we saw you here last," said Ezra. "You remember the night that you

told us about the guns at Crown Point and Ticonderoga."

The boy's words were followed by a curious interruption. A mug, partly filled, shattered upon the brick paved floor near by; they turned surprised and saw a man, apparently advanced in years, bent over a table, his back turned to them. The hand that had held the mug hung at his side, trembling as though with palsy; his whole attitude was as of one stricken with some sudden shock.

Two others sat with the man; they wore the dress of seafarers, and while one was of commanding proportions, the other was small. The heads of both were bent toward the old man; and the boys could see little of them except that they were dark and wore their sailcloth hats pulled low over their foreheads.

After a glance the other lads gave their attention once more to Colonel Knox. But Ezra continued to watch narrowly the actions of the three. As the boys had come along in the dusk toward "The Honest Farmer" he had noticed some figures that seemed to cling to their shadows. He had, also, a dim sort of consciousness that these same figures had entered the inn after them. And now something whispered to him that these were the same—that the men had a purpose in being where they were—that their selection of seats so near to his friends and himself was no accident.

"And," he told himself in a puzzled sort of way, "they seem familiar. I somehow feel that I have met with them before."

He examined the strangers narrowly; in a few moments the old man recovered and seemed to be talking guardedly to his companions; and the boy, more than once, caught a ferret-like look from the smaller of the two seamen that impressed him queerly. More and more he felt that these were persons whom he had known before.

But while he was watching the strangers, he was also listening to the remarks of his friends as they spoke to Colonel Knox. Some little time passed; then the colonel said, addressing them all:

"I came here to-night in the hope of seeing you. It just happens that there is something toward that makes me require the help of a few young spirits who will not hesitate at a little risk."

"We feel flattered," said Nat Brewster, with a smile, "that you should think of us."

Ben Cooper bent forward.

"It has something to do with the big guns at Ticonderoga," said he.

Colonel Knox laughed.

"You are a clever guesser, Master Cooper," said he.

"It was no guess," replied Ben. "I've known all along that you'd not give up that idea of yours. I knew that if you'd get permission, you'd be off to the captured forts at once and try to carry it out."

Ezra, watching the three strangers, fancied them rigid with attention, but at the same time making a show of keeping up a conversation of their own. Once he was about calling his friends' attention to this, but the fear that it might, after all, be but imagination upon his part, deterred him.

"You are right," said the young colonel. "The notion was a pet of mine because I thought it practical and likely to succeed. But I've had great difficulty in convincing others. When they thought of the vast wilderness to be crossed, the lakes and streams, they scouted the plan. It could not be done, they said; those great cannon could never be dragged so tremendous a distance through such a country.

"But at length I got the ear of the commander-in-chief. I flattered myself that he thought me no fool; for he has a way of looking at one that tells its own story.

"'Heavy ordnance is badly needed,' he said, 'and this would be welcome, indeed, if we could but secure it!' Then he fixed me with one of his looks and asked: 'How would you go about getting it here?'

"'I would start in the early fall,' I said. 'On the way I would collect sledges. By the time I reached Ticonderoga, transacted my business and was ready to return, the lakes would be frozen over. I could load the guns upon the sledges and so cross the ice. And so it will be through the wilderness. Lack of roads will not affect me; the snow will be there and the traveling will be as smooth as it can well be.'

"He seemed much struck with this idea and took it under consideration. And now he has given his consent."

"And you are going!" cried George Prentiss, eagerly.

"As soon as I can collect the small party that is to accompany me."

“And that’s why you sought us out!” exclaimed Nat, his face glowing in the firelight. “Good! Shall we go, lads?” turning to the others.

A chorus arose that caused the other frequenters of “The Honest Farmer” to turn about in mild surprise.

“You could not have done us a greater kindness,” said Ezra Prentiss to Colonel Knox. “The work of the camp is, of course, willingly undertaken by us all; but this is the sort of service that we most like.”

“If you are pleased to go,” returned the young colonel, “why, for the matter of that, I am equally pleased to have you. I have heard the stories of your doings since this war began; and of the services you rendered even before it started. They’ve long been abroad in the camp, as have the words uttered in your praise by Colonel Prescott, Mr. Adams, General Putnam and even Washington himself.”

As the lads chorused their low-voiced agreement to ride with Colonel Knox upon this mission which promised so much, Gilbert Scarlett drew his sword belt tighter and leaned forward toward that officer.

“Sir,” spoke he, “if you could contrive to make room for a volunteer in your company, I should be most pleased to make this venture under your leadership. It is true,” and he waved his hand in a gesture of depreciation, “that I am not of this country and am rather a stranger to you all. But,” here he reared his head proudly, “I have had some small experience in onfalls, ambuscades, sieges and other forms of warfare, in various parts of the world. So it is possible that I might be of service to you.”

“Mr. Scarlett,” said Colonel Knox, promptly, “I have heard of you. I accept your offer and am delighted to have you.”

They talked for some little time upon the matter; then the young colonel arose.

“Just when I shall start,” said he, “is a matter of doubt; but it will not be until I can be sure of the ice and snow, which will act such important parts in my plan. However, when we do start,” and he said this with quiet confidence, “we will make all speed and it will not be long thereafter until the King’s guns will be turned upon his governor. And then Boston shall be ours!”

The boys and Scarlett accompanied him to the door and out into the night. Here the colonel began saying something that seemed to interest them; and all but Ezra walked along with him toward his quarters.

Ezra, as he gave a quick look over his shoulder in the doorway, saw the three men at the inn table arise. He closed the door; and as his friends walked slowly away with Colonel Knox, he stepped back into the shadow and waited.

It was the smaller of the two sailor-like men who opened the door of “The Honest Farmer.” His thin face went this way and that, apparently in quest of those who had just left. As he caught the cautious questioning way the man had of holding his head, Ezra gasped in astonishment.

“It’s Jason Collyer!” he muttered.

Collyer’s two friends appeared directly behind him. As he saw him in motion, Ezra had no difficulty in recognizing the larger of these.

“It’s Abdallah,” he told himself. “There is no mistaking that measured step.”

“They have gone in that direction,” said Collyer, pointing down the dark street. “Shall we follow them?”

“There is no need,” spoke Abdallah, and his voice was as smooth as ever. “We have learned all that they can tell.”

“It was luck that made you want to follow them here when you saw them on the way,” said Collyer to the old man. “I confess, sir, I thought it but a waste of time, myself.”

The door of “The Honest Farmer” was now closed; but from a window a broad beam of light streamed out upon the stones. The men stood upon the margin of this and could be plainly seen as they faced away from Ezra, their eyes trying to follow Colonel Knox and the boys.

“Fortune,” said Abdallah, “is a queer thing. Sometimes it smiles upon us; and at others, it frowns. And all for no reason that we can see. Take that last night at my house for example. Everything had gone well, when suddenly that boy”—and he pointed down the dark street, “rode up and changed everything by his shrewdness.”

Here the old man gestured angrily and was about to speak. But Abdallah stopped him.

“It is no time for faultfinding or resentment,” said he, gently. “Rather it is one for self-congratulation. He beat us then, but we will beat him now. When they ride to Ticonderoga for the

guns, they will have their labor for their pains. We," and he laughed softly, "will have been there ahead of them."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Ezra Prentiss, quietly.

He took a step forward as he spoke. The men whirled about with exclamations and stood staring at him as the light from the window fell upon his face. At the same time a steady tramp of feet was heard; the flash of lanthorns came up and down the street. Patrols of continentals were coming from both directions.

"It is always best to make sure of what you say before you say it," resumed the boy. "When we reach Ticonderoga, the guns will still be there; but you will be here, awaiting the judgment of a drumhead court, as spies."

A gasp of dismay went up from the ferret-like Collyer; but Abdallah held up a hand for silence. He addressed Ezra.

"Spies?" said he, gently. "That would be a rough-hewn fate indeed. Think what is meted out to such offenders."

"It is death," said Ezra, solemnly.

"And would you deliver us up to that?"

"It is not for me to pass judgment," answered the lad. "I leave that for my superiors."

"But," and there was a curious note in Abdallah's voice that caught the boy's attention, "you shall decide, for all! And your decision will be in our favor."

"You shall see in a moment," spoke Ezra Prentiss, gravely. "Here comes the American patrol. What is to hinder my giving you up to them?"

"This," said Abdallah.

As he spoke he thrust the old man, who bore him company, forward suddenly. For the first time, Ezra saw this latter plainly.

"Grandfather," he cried chokingly.

The old merchant lifted a hand as though about to denounce the lad; but Abdallah drew him back with a fierce whispered word of warning.

"If we are spies," then said Abdallah to Ezra, "so is your grandfather. If you give us up to those men," and his eyes went toward the patrols, who were now abreast of them, "you must also give him up. And remember," all the gentleness out of his voice and manner, "to give him up means death!"

He paused a moment and then said with a low laugh:

"Speak up; what shall it be? Shall we go or stay?"

And Ezra, his heart frozen with fear, stared first at the patrols and then at his grandfather. Then both hands went up and he gestured them stupidly away.

Instantly they turned and obeyed; within a moment the night had swallowed them up; but still the boy stood there as one turned to stone.

"To save my grandfather's life, I have made myself a traitor to the cause," he whispered to himself. "But I could not help it," a sob swelling in his throat, "I could not help it."

CHAPTER XVII—TELLS OF A RIDE THROUGH THE WILDERNESS AND OF HOW TICONDEROGA'S GUNS BEGAN THEIR JOURNEY

For two days Ezra Prentiss was burdened with the thought of what he had done. His friends wondered at his pale face and dejected manner; they questioned him, but could get nothing but evasive replies.

But one morning as the lad arose he determined to have done with it all.

"If I have misserved the colonies," said he, "I am not fitted to be at liberty."

Within an hour he was at the quarters of General Putnam; and a few moments later found him in the presence of that bluff warrior.

"Well," inquired Putnam, who was still at breakfast, "and what is it now, Master Prentiss, that you should be so intent of face?"

Ezra, in as few words as possible, told his story. Putnam went on with his breakfast, listening and making no comment. When the tale was done he leaned back in his chair and looked at the lad with pursed lips.

“The situation was a pretty one,” said he. “It was do your stern duty and send your grandsire to his death; or allow him to go free and those two rascals with him. In the same position,” continued he, a twinkle in his eye, “I should have been tempted to do as you have done, and no doubt I should have done it.”

“But do you not see what danger I have placed this mission of Colonel Knox in?” cried the lad.

“I must say that I do not,” said Putnam, good-humoredly, as he recommenced upon his breakfast. “Ticonderoga and Crown Point are in the hands of our people and are well guarded. There are not enough British troops in Canada to make an advance upon them; and for Gage to do anything is out of the question.

“The only thing that could be done would be a secret expedition by this man Abdallah and any followers that he might have. And even that would be so difficult as to make it all but impossible. So make your mind easy, my lad. You have done no great harm.”

Ezra went surprisedly from the presence of Putnam. But he was not satisfied, and at once sought Colonel Knox at Washington’s headquarters. This young soldier listened to the boy’s frankly told story. When it was done, he said with a smile:

“Perhaps this will hasten our departure a trifle, but that is all. Don’t worry about what you have done. Under the circumstances your action was perfectly natural. None of us is a Brutus. All of us would find it hard, I hope, to give up those nearest to us to death.”

But for all that Colonel Knox thought that the advent of the spies would hasten his movements, the start was not made until the following month. During the interim, Ezra suffered keenly. A dozen times the delay seemed more than he could endure. His imagination teemed with pictures of happenings at the two strongholds in the wilderness; in his sleep he saw parties of British take them a score of times; he witnessed the sinking of the heavy guns in the depths of the lake; he saw Abdallah’s and Jason Collyer’s grins of derision at his frantic, dream-heavy efforts to prevent this; and always he’d awake crying out to his friends to come to his aid.

More than once he reached the point, in his desperation, of saddling his horse with the idea of setting out alone.

“If I ride on in advance, I may be able to spoil any plan that they may have laid,” he told himself.

But each time, second thought showed him how profitless such an effort would be. He must wait for Colonel Knox, if he was to be of any value. Alone he could accomplish nothing.

His heart leaped one evening when he received word that the expedition would start early next morning. At the time the intelligence reached him he was standing within the Roxbury works, watching the cannonade of the British, which had broken out from shore batteries and shipping a short time before. The roar of the guns was in perfect harmony with the exultation that filled the boy’s breast.

“At last,” he cried to Ben Cooper, who had brought the news, “at last I’ll have a chance to do something.”

Ben, like the other boys, had heard nothing of Ezra’s experience upon the night at “The Honest Farmer”; so now he stared in wonderment at his friend’s display of feeling. But as Ezra made no explanation, the other asked no questions; however, he now and then stole a curious look at the flushed boy at his side.

“Something’s wrong,” Ben told himself. “I’ve noticed that he’s acted very queerly of late. Whatever it is, it’s got a deep hold on him, for I don’t remember ever seeing him look just this way before.”

At sunrise next morning a well-equipped troop of horse was drawn up before Colonel Knox’s quarters. Beside Ezra, Nat, Ben, George and Scarlett, there were a dozen hardy young fellows whose bold faces and stalwart frames told of a willingness to face hardship and the power to endure it. They were all armed with rifle and pistol; axes hung at their saddles; heavy coats and blankets for use amid the rigors of the North country were strapped securely behind them.

When Knox at last appeared and mounted, the troop rode to Washington’s quarters. Here both the commander-in-chief and General Putnam reviewed them.

After nodding his approval of both the party’s appearance and equipment, Washington said:

“How long shall you be on the way?”

“I calculated some two weeks for the going, general,” replied the young colonel. “But we shall be longer upon the return trip, for then we shall have the guns.”

Putnam laughed at this confident answer. A flicker of a smile crossed Washington's grave face; but there was a light of satisfaction in his eyes as he said:

"That you will have them, colonel, I feel sure."

Following the example of the officers, the troop saluted; then at the word, they wheeled and went at a swinging pace through the streets of Cambridge.

The way north was rough—sometimes even trackless. But there was with the party a youth of the name of Bennet, who had been one of Allan's Green Mountain Boys, and had been with that gallant leader at the taking of the two strongholds of the North. He knew every mile of the way, was of vast service in pointing out fords, locating towns, and picking short ways through the forests and hills.

Sometimes they passed the nights at isolated villages; at others they camped in sheltered spots and rolled themselves in their blankets upon the ground. The air grew chiller as the days went by; and as they approached the cold lake regions it grew more so. Their heavy coats and warmer clothing felt very comfortable by the time the first snow fell.

"And now," said Colonel Knox one morning to Ezra, as he surveyed the wild, snow-covered stretch before him with no little satisfaction, "is the time to collect our sledges. Horses or oxen we shall also want; and men to drive them would not be at all amiss."

The troop was that day split up into parties with orders to make a sweep of the region for sledges and teams as they advanced. They covered a good dozen miles of country in their progress and from the first luck was with them. Sledges were to be had with gratifying frequency, also teams of oxen and shaggy, powerful looking horses. Young backwoodsmen willing to venture upon the journey as drivers were also to be found. Faint echoes of the war had reached them in their remote villages; to see a troop of uniformed men belonging to the army of their country gave them a thrill of expectancy and filled them with a desire to go where the issue of the battle was drawn, where blows were being struck, and the far-off King defied.

Ezra Prentiss, Ben Cooper and Scarlett formed one party of sledge hunters. The section given them to cover was rough and boulder-strewn, with only here and there a dirt road or path. Houses were infrequent and clearings in the thick woods rarer still. It was a country of trappers and hunters rather than of farmers; now and then one of these hardy fellows was seen making a tour of his traps or wading in a cold stream with the fresh pelts of fur-bearing animals hanging from his belt.

Once, however, they heard the distant ring of an axe; they made their way through a thick growth of timber and came upon a log house where a young woman and child were visible. Some little distance off a young man was seen cutting down a tree. When they approached him and made their errand known, he looked surprised.

"You've been through this section before, haven't you?" he asked.

"No," replied Ezra.

The look of surprise upon the young man's face deepened.

"That's queer," he said. "Tom Hadley, who lives down the creek aways, was in Skenesboro a couple of weeks ago for provisions; and he met a man who inquired about sledges and offered to buy up all that he could get."

A shock ran through Ezra.

"Did Hadley say what kind of a man he was?" he asked.

"Yes; he was tall and well made. And Tom said he looked like some kind of a foreigner."

Ezra felt sure that it was Abdallah, but desired to make sure.

"He was a rough spoken kind of a man too, I suppose," he insinuated.

But the backwoodsman shook his head.

"No," he replied. "It was just the other way. Tom says the man was the smoothest talker and had the softest ways of any man he ever struck."

"They are ahead of us," thought Ezra in a sort of panic. "They will have secured all the sledges and horses—we will be left helpless to do anything."

But that night when the troop drew together at the point named for the camp, the boy found Colonel Knox very well pleased indeed. Five drivers had been picked up, three span of oxen and some half dozen heavy sledges.

When Ezra told him what he had heard, Colonel Knox said:

“They seem very enterprising; but we have no occasion for worry, for they seem to be meeting with little success. And even did they collect all the sledges on the route, don’t forget that we could change our route. Another thing; there is plenty of timber; we could build our own sledges, if put to it.”

Ezra saw the truth of this. But still he could not help a feeling of fear, for he knew that Abdallah was a man of resource and daring; and what a person of that sort would do next was never to be guessed.

When they reached Shoreham, Colonel Knox had collected forty-two sledges in all. These were at once hauled across the frozen lake to the fort and the officer in charge made acquainted with the nature of the expedition.

No time was lost by the energetic Knox. The very next day he set to work selecting what cannon he thought would be required, both at Ticonderoga and Crown Point. His band of hardy adventurers, ably assisted by the little garrison of the forts, loaded these securely upon the sledges. In all there were thirteen brass and twenty-six iron cannon; eight brass and six iron mortars. Also there were twenty-three hundred pounds of lead for bullets, and a barrel of flints.

All was ready one night and as Colonel Knox desired to have nothing delay him, he gave the order to move at once.

“To-night,” he said, “the ice upon the lake will bear us. To-morrow morning it may be so that we could not venture across.”

NO TIME WAS LOST BY KNOX

The oxen were being yoked and the horses harnessed to the sledges when Ezra approached his commander with a salute.

“Colonel,” said he, anxiously, “would it not be well to send out an advance? The ice, even now, may not be as safe as you think.”

There was something in his tone that attracted Knox’s attention.

“What has made you think that?” asked he.

Ezra flushed in the light of the pine torches.

“Since the night of which I told you,” said he, “I have been so anxious that my nerves and senses often play me false. It may be so now, but a while ago,” and his eyes went out across the frozen stretch of water, striving to pierce the darkness that overhung it, “I thought I saw a glimmer of light out there.”

“It was probably the ice throwing back the flashing of the torches,” said Colonel Knox. “But,” kindly, “if you have any doubts in the matter it would be as well to settle them at once. Suppose you take a few men and look about before we start with the guns.”

“Thank you, colonel,” said the lad, gratefully, “I shall do so.”

He at once called together Nat, Ben Cooper, Scarlett and his brother George.

“See to your arms,” he said, quietly. And as they examined the priming of rifle and pistol, he continued: “We are going to cross the lake in the most direct route. Let no one speak unless compelled to; and even then, not above a whisper.”

All five left the circle of light and advanced across the ice. They had pulled heavy moccasins over their boots upon approaching the lake in the first place, in order to secure their footing upon the smooth surface; these now deadened their footfalls as they carefully made their way along.

Almost two-thirds of the distance had been traversed when Ezra suddenly paused. His outstretched hands brought the others to a halt also.

“Hark!” said Ezra, softly.

All stood motionless for a time. At length Nat Brewster whispered:

“I fancied that I heard something, but I could not make out what it was.”

Here Nat felt Ezra’s hand close over his arm in a powerful grip. At once he became silent and all stood bending forward, listening once more.

From some distance across the ice came a faint, rasping noise. Now and then a quicker and heavier sound reached them. It was as though blows were being struck.

“Do you understand?” breathed Ezra. “Some one is cutting through the ice! It’s a trap! The sledges are to cross this way.”

The sharp hissing of indrawn breaths told him that they appreciated the situation.

“That rasping, now, is made by a saw,” said Scarlett, guardedly. “I can see their plan, whoever they are. And a rarely pretty one it is. They will saw, in part, a stretch of ice that we were almost sure to cross. When we reached it, the ice would give way, and we, perhaps, but the cannon surely, would go to the bottom of the lake.”

“Ready with your rifles,” whispered Ezra.

Softly they stole forward. Clearer and clearer grew the sounds, and finally they were able to discern a dozen or more laboring forms in the darkness.

“Now,” said Ezra, as he sank to one knee and threw his rifle forward, “fire when I give the word.”

His comrades crouched beside him, their weapons leveled. And just then there came the gentle voice of Abdallah through the dimness.

“I think this will be a surprise, Jason Collyer. What do you say?”

A chuckling laugh followed this, apparently from the ferret-faced young man. And just then Ezra spoke the word, the five rifles rang out and a chorus of shrieks rang out in the stillness. There was a huddle of falling men, a scattering of others, then Ezra shouted:

“The pistols!”

Like lightning the heavy pistols were drawn; angrily they spat their messengers into the darkness in the direction of the running feet. From the direction of Ticonderoga came a swirl of moving lights. Then a score of men hurried up, Colonel Knox at their head; and their flaring torches lit up the scene.

“You were right, then,” said Knox as he took in the situation at a glance. “And it was just such a trap as we would have walked into blindly.”

A half hour later, the sledges, with their precious burden of guns, crossed the lake at a point higher up; and away they trailed through the wilderness, over the snow, while behind them, among the others, lay Jason Collyer and Abdallah, their darkened eyes turned up toward the starless sky.

CHAPTER XVIII—CONCLUSION

The snow was deep and the sledge teams had heavy going at first. But, after a few days, the snow began to pack, and the progress of Colonel Knox’s party became more easy. There was little or no difficulty with the streams; these were frozen solid, for the winter had developed into a remarkably severe one.

However, fresh falls of snow now and then impeded their advance, and they were content to make very few miles a day; but they pushed doggedly on, nevertheless, for they knew that their burden was urgently needed at Cambridge.

It was at Fort George that Ezra and Ben Cooper left the party and rode forward to Boston bearing the news of the expedition's success.

The lads never forgot the look of triumph that swept into Washington's face as he read the dispatch. Generals Putnam and Ward and Colonel Prescott were with him at the time and he read the missive aloud to them. It ran:

> "'December 17th.
>
> "'I hope in sixteen or seventeen days to present to your Excellency a noble train of artillery, the inventory of which I have enclosed.'"

Then he read the inventory, and the boys saw the eyes of the other officers kindle.

"Now that," cried Putnam, striking the table a mighty blow, "is something like!"

"It would seem," commented General Ward, "that fortune has thought it worth while to smile upon us for once, at any rate."

"With the shells and powder from the King's stores at New York and the cargo of the ordnance brig lately captured," spoke Prescott, "we now have a comparative plenty of ammunition. What is there now to hinder us from moving to the reduction of Boston?"

"Nothing but the opportunity of doing so without injury to those of our own people who are still therein," replied the commander-in-chief.

Great events had happened in the past few months. Not the least of these was the recall of General Gage by the British ministry and the appointment of Howe in his place. Washington had practically discharged one army and recruited another in the face of the enemy. The colonies were making a united effort toward liberty; for until this time New England had borne alone the brunt of the uprising.

The lads found the Porcupine at their quarters, and in a conversation with that small but very shrewd person, they learned a great deal of what had taken place.

"Last month," said the dwarf, as he sat cross-legged before them upon a wide settle, while they ate of the good food set before them, "there was a party of British light infantry landed at Lechmere's Point. They desired to take off some cattle; but Colonel Patterson and our riflemen objected and there was a brisk fight in which the British were driven off."

"Have our men been keeping their hearts up?" asked Ezra.

"Fairly well. But last month things were very bad indeed in this camp. We had nothing—no food to speak of, no quarters to keep out of the weather, no fire to warm ourselves by, no clothing but rags to hide our nakedness."

"Well," remarked Ben Cooper, "so long as it was kept from the knowledge of the British, it was not at its worst."

"But it was not kept from their knowledge," returned the Porcupine. "General Howe knew of our situation all the time!"

"And he did not attack!" cried Ezra, wonderingly.

"He had been expecting reinforcements, so our spies learned," replied the dwarf with a wise nod of the head. "And as they did not arrive, he kept waiting. You know," and here a wide grin spread across the speaker's face, "that he's tried our mettle once, and so he was in no hurry to do so again without a good force behind him."

"And the general?" asked Ben, "how did he take it all?"

"He went about as calm as the morning," replied the Porcupine in high admiration. "You'd never have thought but what everything was as well as it could be. He seemed always planning and building defenses. General Putnam was told to occupy and fortify Cobble Hill. Two half moon batteries were thrown up between Lechmere's Point and Cambridge River. Three places between Sewall's Point and Roxbury Neck were also strengthened, to be manned in case of a sortie when the bay is frozen over."

"But that things have taken a turn, I can see plainly," said Ezra. "The camp has a brisk look; the men look content; the officers hold their heads high."

"It all began with Captain Manly's capture of the 'Nancy' brig," said the Porcupine. "Ah, there is a brave and enterprising officer; if there are many on the sea like him, they'll give the King's admirals trouble enough."

"The 'Nancy' is probably the ordnance brig we heard Colonel Prescott mention," said Ben to Ezra.

The Porcupine nodded his head.

“It’s more than likely,” said he. “All have talked of it more or less. You see Captain Manly, who is in command of the ‘Lee,’ took the ‘Nancy’ as she came into the bay, and carried her into Cape Ann. And she proved to be a most wonderful treasure ship—crammed to the hatches with military stores of every sort.”

“Excellent!” cried both listeners together.

“So full was she, and so struck was General Washington by her value, that he at once sent a strong guard to protect her. He felt sure that the British would not rest until they had done something to recover a vessel so desirable.”

“And did they?”

“They had not the time, so prompt were the general’s orders, and so rapidly were they carried out. Teams were impressed, the minutemen about Cape Ann were called out to give their help; and in a little while the cargo was discharged and removed to a safe place within our lines.”

“Now that was an admirable stroke of fortune,” cried Ben Cooper. “The stores must have pleased everybody much, to change the complexion of things so.”

“They would have pleased a king,” said the Porcupine. “There were two thousand muskets; one hundred thousand flints, thirty thousand round shot for one, six and twelve-pounders; thirty tons of musket shot; eleven mortar beds; and one great thirteen-inch brass mortar that weighs not an ounce less than twenty-seven hundred pounds.”

“A most astonishing ship, indeed!” said Ezra Prentiss.

“Then there came powder and shells from New York about the same time. Barracks were built to house the troops during the severe weather. Other ships were taken by Captain Manly and seamen of his quality. Among the cargo were thousands of uniforms intended for the British soldiers, and hundreds of barrels of salt beef and pork; woolen goods in vast quantities; flour, hard biscuit and other things were taken. And, so then, as we were very well off, indeed, the recruits began to take heart and offer themselves for service: the regiments are filling up, and we will soon be quite strong once more.”

“But the British,” asked Ezra, “how do they like all their winter’s wear and provisions falling into other hands?”

“Why,” answered the dwarf with a shake of his big head, “they endure it very ill indeed. As we advanced into comfort, so did they fall in need. Fuel and food are very high in Boston at this time; and the citizens are suffering much more than the soldiery. Some few vessels have gotten safely by our privateers, but Howe has kept their stores for the use of his troops.”

“They have made no advance, then?” said Ben.

“Rather they have fallen back,” answered the dwarf, and he grinned delightedly. “They had begun to build barracks on Bunker Hill, but building materials were so scarce, the winds grew so keen, and the snow fell so constantly that Howe at length bid Clinton strike his tents and return to Boston. Lieutenant-Colonel Agnew and seven hundred are left to man the three redoubts that are now upon the hill.”

The middle of December found Boston all but upon the verge of starvation. The townspeople were desperate and Lord Howe feared that they might rise against him. He offered to allow any of those who desired to leave the city, and like Gage, covertly threatened the torch in case he were attacked from within. As a protection from an assault by Washington, which he daily dreaded, there came an outbreak of smallpox among his troops.

“That will keep the rebels out, even if our guns fail to do so,” he said.

British cannon were planted all about in the city’s hills and open places; its churches and unoccupied houses were torn down by the soldiers for fuel; Faneuil Hall was a playhouse in which mocking comedies were presented; Old South Church was used as a riding school. Under a strict martial law the people of the city were all but prisoners. Thousands now took advantage of Howe’s permission, crossed in boats to Point Shirly and dispersed into the country.

On the first day of January, in that most memorable year of 1776, the first continental flag was thrown to breeze, and as its thirteen stripes rippled at the top of the pole, it was saluted with tremendous shouting; and thirteen guns were fired by way of a salute. Upon the same day, the King’s speech upon the opening of Parliament was received in camp. For the first time the Americans heard that King George contemplated the hiring of foreign troops to help subdue them. At this, their rage was without bounds; they hooted the King, his Parliament and his army; then they burnt his speech and otherwise bid him defiance.

A little later than this came the news of the American defeat at Quebec and the death of the heroic young Montgomery, whom Washington had selected to lead the expedition against that

city. Appeals were then sent out to various colonies to hurry some fresh regiments to Cambridge; and Congress formally authorized Washington to attack Boston at any time and in any manner that he thought most efficient.

When the army was finally in sufficient strength to warrant his so doing, Washington took the step that he long knew would bring him victory or defeat.

“It will bring on a general attack,” he was heard to say; “we will either be forced from our position, or the British will be compelled to take to their ships.”

This step was the occupation of Dorchester Heights. From this elevation Washington could reach Boston with the heavy guns from Ticonderoga, which had in the meantime been brought in by Colonel Knox. It was March when preparations were begun, and Ezra and his friends were in the thick of the matter.

Gilbert Scarlett was especially valuable in the designing of chandeliers, fascines and such like, necessary in the erection of the works; also with the aid of his boy friends, he worked with the spirit of a dozen in the collection of bateaux in which to transport the men.

When the time for movement arrived, Washington had forty-five of these clumsy craft, each capable of seating eighty men. Two floating batteries were held with them in the Charles River; hundreds of militia came pouring into camp to lend what aid they could to the enterprise.

The design was kept secret; to divert the attention of the enemy a brisk bombardment and cannonade was begun on the night of the second of March, from Cobble Hill, Roxbury and Lechmere’s Point. Many houses were shattered by this fire; the British returned it with spirit, but did little damage. On the night of March fourth this was repeated, and about seven o’clock, General Thomas with about two thousand men marched to take possession of Dorchester Heights. The entrenching tools, under care of a large detachment, were sent on ahead; later the main body, with three hundred carts, loaded with fascines and twisted hay, followed.

All night the Americans labored; the moon was brilliant, the guns roared, the arching shells burst high in the air. And when morning dawned, two forts were in a sufficient state of advancement to resist small arms and grape-shot.

If the British had been surprised to see the works raised in a night upon Breed’s Hill, they were astounded at the sight of those which now met their gaze upon Dorchester Heights.

“It looks like the work of twelve thousand men,” declared Lord Howe to his generals. “The rebels have done more in one night than my army has done in a month. The genii must have aided them.”

These works commanded both the harbor and town of Boston. The British admiral at once decided that the fleet could not ride in safety unless the Americans were displaced.

“We must do one of two things,” he told General Howe. “The Yankees must be driven from that post, or we must evacuate Boston.”

This enraged the governor. He had a very high notion of British honor and military superiority.

“They will be driven from the Heights,” he declared, grimly.

At once he went to work. Twenty-four hundred men were ordered to embark in transports, rendezvous at Castle William and make a night attack upon the American position. The command of this force was given to the gallant Earl Percy, the same who had come to the retreating column under Lieutenant-Colonel Smith as it fell back in defeat from Lexington in the spring before.

Washington saw this movement and sent two thousand men to reinforce General Thomas; and with the reinforcement marched Ezra Prentiss and his friends. Everywhere among the Americans was anxiety to meet the foe.

“I never saw such high spirits anywhere,” said Nat Brewster.

“Every man on the Heights seems exultant,” said Ezra. “They seem to think victory is ready at their hands.”

“And a right good thought that is for men about to engage a hostile force,” observed Gilbert Scarlett.

“Did you see the rows of barrels?” asked George Prentiss. “They are filled with earth, and have been placed in front. Upon the enemies’ advance they will be rolled down the hillside upon them.”

While things were being made ready, General Washington appeared upon the ground to inspect what was going forward and to cheer up the troops.

“Remember, men, it is the fifth of March,” he said. “Avenge the deaths of your brethren shot down in Boston.”

At fort Number Two, near Cambridge, a fine body of four thousand troops were paraded and made ready to assault the British lines. This was arranged into two divisions; one was under General Greene, the other under General Sullivan—and the whole under command of General Putnam.

But the fight was not to be just yet. The wind blew up so furiously that the British transports could not reach their destinations; and the surf was too heavy for boats to have made a landing.

The next day the British attack was still further delayed for the same reason; and all the time the Americans were increasing the strength of their works.

“I can find it in my heart to be sorry that the attack was not made,” Washington said to his generals. “Everything was complete for the reception of the enemy; we can hardly hope for a repetition of the same conditions.”

Howe was forced to abandon his project and his troops returned to Boston. His situation was now perplexing and critical. The fleet could not ride at anchor because of the positions of the American batteries, and the British army was unable to drive them from these positions. The Boston Tories, in a panic of fear of what might happen, demanded the protection which had long been guaranteed. No dispatches had been received from London for a long time.

“It looks,” grumbled the British officers, “as though we’d been left to get out of a bad scrape as best we can.”

“To remain in Boston,” said General Howe to the Tories, “will put my troops in great danger.”

“But if you don’t remain, you will put us loyalists, and all property, in equal danger,” promptly answered Ruggles, the Tory leader.

But Howe was now looking at the other side of the picture. The fate of property was nothing to him when his army was in the balance. When he had assumed command, he had written the ministry many reasons why Boston should be held. But with the great guns upon Dorchester Heights frowning down upon him, he saw many reasons why he should abandon it.

Washington desired to gain possession of the city above all else; but he wished to do so without bloodshed if it could be done. However, he went on with his preparations. On the ninth he planted a battery on Bird’s Hill and began firing upon the British shipping. Nook’s Hill was an eminence greatly feared by Howe and his officers. All along they had felt that if the Americans established themselves upon it, Boston would, indeed, be at their mercy.

Washington now directed that Nook’s Hill be occupied. A strong detachment was sent there in the night. While the guns were being brought up, Ezra Prentiss noted a soldier impudently kindling a fire behind the hill. He sprang toward the man, crying:

“Hello! Put that out!”

The man was a surly fellow and made a short reply. Ezra, without parleying, kicked the blazing wood about and began trampling upon it. But it was too late, the enemy saw the light, suspected what was going forward, and began to fire. This was the beginning of a night of terror; the American batteries answered at once from Cobble Hill, Lechmere’s Point, Roxbury and Cambridge; the British thundered and raved through the darkness like the stubborn fighters that they were. More than eight hundred cannon-shots were fired before morning, and the result was that the American works upon Nook’s Hill were stopped and the troops withdrawn.

But at the same time, this event showed General Howe that to attempt to hold Boston any longer would be folly. His horse transports were ordered to fall back to Castle William; all goods which would likely be of value to the “rebels” were confiscated. Ammunition which could not be carried was thrown into the river; guns were spiked and gun-carriages were broken.

While waiting for their ships to assemble, the city was practically given up to sack by the Tories. This news reached the American lines and Ezra and George Prentiss were greatly worried about it.

“If the British really mean to evacuate, this will make it all the harder for those Tories who are left behind,” said George.

“And grandfather is just determined, or stubborn, enough to be among those,” answered Ezra, anxiously.

In both their minds was a picture of the grim old merchant, deserted, unprotected and at the mercy of a populace whom he had long reviled. And both fervently hoped that the outgoing of Howe would be at once followed by the ingoing of Washington; as an unpatrolled city, even for a short time, might mean the death of Seth Prentiss.

On March sixteenth, as the British were still apparently undecided whether to abandon their now assembled vessels or no, Washington took the step that forced the issue. Once more he ordered a night occupation of Nook’s Hill. And this time, in spite of the enemy’s fire, he held it.

The effect was instantaneous. At nine o'clock the garrison left Bunker Hill; fleets of boats loaded with soldiers and Tories put out from the wharves of Boston.

Instantly the American troops under Putnam were put in motion. Bunker Hill was occupied; a compact force crossed to Boston from that end; another advanced across the Neck under Colonel Learned. These, under the command of Putnam, at once seized all the important posts and manned them. Ezra, Nat, Scarlett and the others, who had all crossed with Colonel Learned, rode in search of Putnam. When they found that stout warrior in the midst of his work, Ezra saluted and said:

"General, if I and my friends can be spared, we'd like to ride to Sun Court."

"Why?" asked Putnam.

"My grandfather lives there; he may be in danger."

"I understand," replied the general. "Go at once; you have my authority to put down any kind of illegal violence."

So away the five dashed through the streets. The smashed doors and windows of stores mutely told their tale; the rows of razed houses whose timbers had gone to keep the British army warm during the winter, left great gaps and also made the town look queer and strange. Gaunt and wan-faced people feebly cheered the boys as they raced over the stones; bands of eager, wolfish-looking men were already prowling about in search of what plunder the outgoing army had been forced to leave behind.

As they approached Sun Court, a muffled roar began to reach their ears. It was the sound of distant voices, angry, threatening, and high-lifted.

"Push on!" cried Ezra, his face whitening.

Urging their mounts to the utmost, they wheeled out of Fish Street into Prince's. Louder grew the cries; people were pouring into Sun Court from every direction. Turning the corner the five rode over the bricked pavement into the midst of these and to the edge of a huge, swaying, shouting mob gathered before Seth Prentiss' door. A stout man with a very red face and wearing the smock of a butcher stood upon the steps.

"He's had his will with us this many a day," cried this person loudly, "and now his British friends have left him for us to have our will with him."

There was a shriek from the mob, and a tossing of hats and arms.

"Let us have him out of his house," yelled a voice above all the others. "Let us show him that we, too, have our day."

With one impulse the crowd swept forward; some were battering upon the door and heavy shutters, when the boys and Scarlett came plunging through them.

"Hold!" cried Ezra, as he reached his grandfather's door. He wheeled his prancing horse, as did his friends, and faced the mob. "It is the order of General Putnam that no violence be offered to any one. In the name of the Continental Congress we bid you to stand back!"

The uniforms of the five were new to the men of Boston, but the name of Putnam and the mention of the Continental Congress had their effect, and they hesitated.

But the red-faced butcher urged them on.

"Will you be stopped by a parcel of boys?" he shouted. "Will you be cheated of your revenge by a handful of young upstarts because they came a-riding on horseback and use high words?"

The crowd wavered. The butcher saw this and redoubled his efforts; then Scarlett dismounted and approached him quietly. Hooking his thumbs in his sword belt the soldier of fortune said:

"My friend, you are a stout fellow enough, but you make overmuch noise for even one of your girth."

And with that he took the butcher by the scruff of the neck and shook him like a rat. The man sputtered and coughed and fought back. But he was but as an infant in the hands of the slender but powerful adventurer, and as they witnessed his discomfiture, some of the crowd began to laugh. Then a roar of mirth went up; and seeing the good nature of the crowd, Ezra held up his hand for silence and cried:

"Boston is now in the hands of General Washington and his army. Justice will be done every man. It is your place to see to it that no good American, through a spirit of revenge, falls into the usages of the British. Go to your homes. If you have a complaint to make of any man, make it to the proper authorities. To take the law into your own hands is dangerous, for you cannot see the end of such a thing."

There were a few scattered cheers to show that the people realized the force of this reasoning. But at the same time was heard the quick tramp of a body of Continental infantry, one of the many sent to patrol the city; and Ezra never knew but what their arrival had more to do with the mob's change of front than anything he had said. At any rate, they were instantly seized with a huge admiration at this display of their national force, and burst into loud huzzas. The officer in command of the troop bid them disperse, as it was against the general's orders for any crowds to collect until the city had come under control; and as both townfolk and troop passed out of Sun Court, Nat Brewster said:

"It was a fortunate circumstance that brought this finish about. I had thought to have harder work of it."

"And I," said a voice behind them.

All turned. The door of the mansion had opened and Seth Prentiss stood before them. He was dressed in gown and slippers; and large silver-rimmed spectacles seemed to add to the harshness of his face.

Regarding both Ezra and George for a moment in silence, he said:

"I had not expected to ever bid either of you welcome to my house. But if I were to say that I did not silently welcome you when those good friends of mine came hammering at my door, I would not be speaking the truth."

He ran his eyes over them with an expression upon his face that neither of his grandsons had ever seen there before; then he continued:

"Neither did I ever think that you would make a better selection of government than myself."

"Grandfather!" both boys flung themselves from their steeds and approached him, joy in their faces.

"I mean it," cried the old merchant. "None has kept faith with the King more loyally than I have done. But he has deserted me—he has deserted his city. And now I desert him!"

He wrung the hands of his delighted grandsons, then shook his gnarled fist in the direction of the bay.

"Their ships are there, crowded with armed men; they have fled, and in so doing showed me that they are not competent to rule." Just then another compact body of Continentals went by with throbbing drums and squealing fife. The old man watched them to the turn of the street. "Your General Washington is not of the fleeing kind," spoke he. "He believes in a cause and holds to it like a true man should."

"In that, Master Prentiss, you say rightly," said Gilbert Scarlett. "And not only is he a true man, but a great soldier as well—a soldier destined to gain many victories. One victory already he has gained beside the taking of Boston Town," with a laugh. "And that is over Gilbert Scarlett, soldier of fortune. A commission is mine, they have told me, for the asking. Always have I loved great leaders; and you may be sure that I will not delay longer now in asking for it."

"Sir," responded Seth Prentiss, "you show yourself a man of sense. And now," with a bow, "will you dismount and enter? Also you, young gentlemen," to Nat and Ben. "From now on the friends of my grandsons will be very welcome here."

And so they tied their horses and entered the fine old house. As the door shut behind him, closing out the distant huzzas and the throbbing of the Continental drums, a sense of great peace filled Ezra's heart.

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