

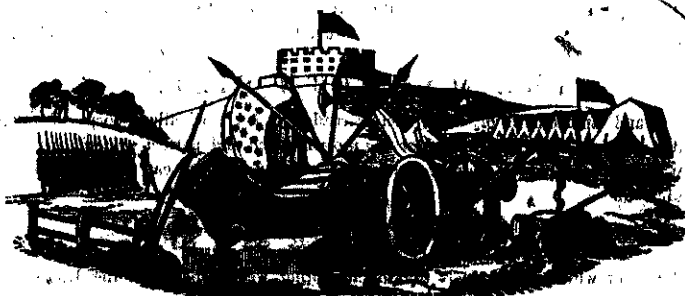
THE  
**YANKEE CHAMPION:**

—OR—

**THE TORY AND HIS LEAGUE.**

A Revolutionary Story of the Land and Sea.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.



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## THE YANKEE CHAMPION.

### CHAPTER I.

THE DYING PATRIOT AND HIS SON.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning of the 19th of April, 1775. Not far from the old North Bridge, in Concord, Mass., stood an humble dwelling, the home of one of the noblest hearted of our provincial fathers. In the small front room that looked out upon the road stood a wide bed, and upon it lay the wasted form of an old man, whose snowy hair and wrinkled brow betokened that more years than are generally allotted to man had made him old. His eye was as bright as the eagle's, and as he lay there now, upon the verge of the grave, those orbs, through which shine the life-beams of the soul, were gleaming and sparkling with an unwonted fire, and the thin, pale lips were tightly compressed, as though the heart had feelings it dared not utter.

By the side of the bed, and holding the old man by the wrist, sat a middle-aged man, upon whose countenance reposed that look of professional gravity that at once betokens the "doctor."

At the foot of the bed stood a young man, who had just seen his twenty-fourth year. He was tall and stout in his build, though the fairness

and symmetry of his proportions did not give at once to the eye of the beholder a true idea of the physical strength which he possessed. His features were beautifully regular, or, more properly speaking, they were nobly so—with large, dark eyes, a full, open brow, a nose slightly inclined to the Roman cast, and lips that seemed capable of expressing, in their silence, every emotion of the soul. The young man was dressed in a garb that bore some slight marks of the "ocean style," and the rich bronze upon his face evinced pretty plainly that he had not been long from the salt water. He had a powder-horn hung over his shoulder, and his right hand grasped a heavy musket upon which he was leaning. The hand that held the weapon was trembling violently, and even the short raven curls that clustered about his brow and temples shook as though a fierce wind were sweeping through them, while his features were evidently worked upon by powerful and conflicting emotions.

Such was Walter Nixon, and that old man upon the bed was his father. Walter had been brought up mostly at sea. When quite young

he had entertained an irresistible desire to follow the sailor's fortune, and his father procured him a situation on board a good ship belonging to Mr. Samuel Davis, a wealthy merchant of Boston, and as we find him now he had been returned but about three weeks from a long voyage, and during that time he had been in constant attendance upon his sick parent.

"Hark!" uttered the old man, as the heavy tramp of feet sounded upon his ear, Hark! Heard you that noise, doctor?"

"Yes, I did," returned the doctor.

"And what is it?" asked Nixon, almost raising himself upon his elbow. "Walter, go to the door, and see."

The young man quickly obeyed, and when he returned he looked pale and excited—but there was no fear in that pallor.

"What is it, Walter?"

"Father," answered the young man, his eye burning with an intense fire as he spoke; "the British troops have collected at the old bridge, and our men are marching to dislodge them. The hireling soldiers have broken open the store-house and destroyed our flour, they have set the court-house on fire, and they have cut down the liberty-pole on the hill."

"Cut down the liberty-pole!" exclaimed the old man, fairly starting up in his bed. "Great God! and has it come to this!—Walter, I helped plant that liberty-pole—I helped build that store-house, and I must lay inactive here while a foreign foe thus tramples upon us. Who leads the provincials, my boy?"

"Major Buttrick leads them, but Colonel Robinson is with him, and so is Captain Davis. They are marching against the regulars with undaunted firmness."

"May a just God strengthen the hands of my countrymen, and make their eyes sure," ejaculated Nixon, as he folded his thin hands together, and with painful difficulty raised them above his head. "Walter," he continued, "that is a faithful old musket you hold in your hand; let it speak for me. Go, join your countrymen. There should be a Nixon in the battle-field when our country calls for her sons to strike the invader. Go, Walter."

The young man hesitated, and gazed anxiously upon his father.

"Do you hesitate, my boy?" asked Nixon, while a quick shade passed over his features.

"But suppose I should not see you again alive!" said Walter, in trembling accents. "O, I must not leave my old father here to die without his son to close his eyes. I am all that is left you on earth."

"Stop not for me, Walter," and the shade that had rested upon the old man's face gave place to a grateful look as he spoke. "I shall live till you return."

The youth turned an anxious look upon the doctor. The invalid at once caught the movement, and he comprehended its meaning.

"Doctor," said he, "tell my boy that I will live till he returns."

"Ah," uttered the man of medicine, shaking his head with a dubious expression, "I cannot give him such an assurance, for I fear that I might deceive him. There is nothing to be gained by hiding the truth. You are liable to drop off at any moment, and when your death-stroke comes we shall have but little warning of its approach."

"I know I am very near my end," returned the old man, in a tone of calm resignation. "for I have lived longer now than it generally takes God to let his children remain on earth, and I am willing to go; but I shrink at the thought yet.—Hark! Hear you that drum and fife? Are they not ours, Walter?"

"Yes, father. That music belongs to the company from Acton."

"I thought so. Hear it shriek out upon the air. My boy, if what the messenger, that passed here this morning, told us be true, then eight of our countrymen lay dead upon the greensward of Lexington—and they fell by British bullets! Fly, fly, to join your bold townsmen. I will live, Walter, till you return. Go, and when you come back I will bless you, and, if you fall, I'll bless my patriot boy in heaven. I shall not die, so long as there is a British soldier in Concord—I feel it, I know it."

Walter Nixon sprang to the bedside, pressed his lips upon the wrinkled brow of his father, uttered forth a short prayer, and then grasping his musket more firmly in his hand, he hurried from the house just as the little band of patriots were passing.

"I must have room in your front ranks, major," he exclaimed, as he came up to the head of the body.

"You shall, my noble young man," heartily responded Buttrick. "Fall in where it suits you best."

The provincials were formed in double file, and Walter took his place immediately behind the musicians. At length the British red-coats were in sight on the west side of the river, but as the American militia approached they marched across the bridge and faced about upon the east side, where they commenced tearing up the planks. Buttrick seeing this, rushed forward, and his gallant band followed him, and as they came near the bridge the British commenced firing. The first volley took no effect, but at the second, Captain Isaac Davis fell, and his head rested upon the foot of Walter Nixon. The young man stooped down, and lifting the head of the gallant captain in his hands he laid it upon a green sod, and then sprang forward upon the bridge, and in a moment more old Nixon's musket was levelled upon the enemy.

"Fire, fellow-soldiers! fire!" vehemently shouted Major Buttrick, as he saw the gallant Davis fall.

Beneath the first fire of the Americans one British soldier bit the dust in death, and Walter Nixon knew 'twas his bullet that did the deed. The enemy fled before the onset of the provincials, and joined the main body of the regulars in the centre of the town, and ere long afterwards the whole royal detachment had commenced their disastrous and never-to-be-forgotten retreat towards Boston.

Old Nathan Nixon heard the rattling of the muskets at the bridge, and it was with difficulty that the doctor could keep him down in his bed. The old patriot's muscles swelled and worked like the sinews of a trip-hammer, and his bright eye gleamed more brightly than ever.

"Doctor," he said, "I would to God I were in the place of one of those men who fell this morning at Lexington. They told me that poor Jonathan Harrington fell with a British bullet in his breast, and that he died while attempting to crawl up to his own door-stone."

"Yes," returned the doctor, as he dashed away a tear from his eye, "this was a cruel fate. His wife sat at her window and saw him when he fell. Then she saw him start up, and she saw the blood streaming from his breast. She rushed out to meet him, but she was only in time to see him die!"

The old man closed his eyes, and for several moments he remained silent.

"Doctor," he said, at length, "these eight men who fell at Lexington this morning are the seeds from whence shall spring a glorious republican trade. I know that the great provincial heart will afford it a rich soil in which to grow. England has made her own bed—now let her beware of the thunders she has awakened about her resting-place."

"I believe you speak truly," returned the doctor, in a thoughtful mood.

"Speak truly? I know I do. I know the true republican hearts that beat in Massachusetts, and I know, too, that the other colonies will not flinch before British steel."

At this moment, Walter rushed into the house. His face was flushed with excitement, and his bosom swelled with a proud emotion.

"What of the British, my boy? what of the British?" quickly asked the old man.

"They have fled like a flock of sheep, and are now on their way to Boston," returned Walter, in tones of exultation. "They have not even done a fiftieth part of what they were sent to perform, for most of our military stores were hidden in the woods before the invaders came up."

"Fled! They've fled!" fairly shouted Nixon, as he raised himself upon his elbow. "The regulars have fled before our raw militia! Then I can die content. Are our countrymen pursuing them, Walter?"

"Yes, the minute-men are pouring in from

all quarters. The intelligence has spread through all the country like wildfire, and American muskets are gleaming behind nearly every wall and bush near the road."

"Good, good. God be praised! Walter, come here."

The old patriot's voice sank to a deep, meaning tone, and his son approached the bedside. He set the still warm musket against the post, and then took his father's hand in his own.

"My boy, has that old musket been of service in your hands?"

"Yes, father. At the first fire by our men only one of the British fell, and 'twas your musket that sent forth the messenger of his death. I know it, for I aimed at his heart, and I saw him when he dropped."

A bright light passed over the old man's features, and he grasped his son more tightly by the hand.

"Walter," he said, "go to my closet and bring me the sword that hangs there."

The young man obeyed, and when he returned he bore in his hand the desired weapon. It was evidently an old sword, but age had not impaired it, either in value or appearance. The scabbard was of black leather, heavily guarded and mounted with silver, and the hilt was also of silver.

"Let me take it," said Nixon.

The weapon was handed to him, and he tried to draw the blade, but his strength was not equal to the task, and he handed it back to his son.

"Draw the blade," he said, "for I am too far gone to handle it now."

Walter unsheathed the weapon, and as it flashed in the light, the old man put forth his hand and grasped it by the hilt. The blade was long and heavy, and the edges were as sharp as ever.

"My son," the old man continued, "this weapon was my father's. He gave it to me when he was on his death-bed, and made me promise to keep it bright, and never to use it save when honor or dire necessity called for it. I have kept my promise faithfully, though I have not often had occasion to use the sword.

Now, Walter, I give it into your keeping, and I feel sure that I trust it to one who will never tarnish its brightness by a dishonorable deed."

"Your confidence, dear father, shall never be abused," said the young man, as he took the sword.

"I believe you, Walter. And now the horizon of our country's affairs betokens that a strife is at hand which must either end in American independence, or in the lasting curse of England's iron rule. It depends upon America's young sons to decide what shall be the fate of coming generations on our native soil. Promise me, my child, that when that struggle comes your sword shall not rest till our land is free, or till your arm is stiffened in death."

"I do promise it," exclaimed the young man, as he raised his eyes towards heaven; "and as I hope for salvation hereafter I will be true to that promise."

"Amen!" responded the old man, and as he spoke he stretched forth his hand, and laid it upon the weapon. "Walter," he continued, "never think of exchanging that sword for a better, for a better is not to be found in the country. It is old, and it has seen service, and its worth has been proved. That steel is as fine as a diamond's point, and it is as subtle as the finest temper of Damascus can make it. Kneel down, my boy, kneel down."

Walter sunk upon his knees at his father's bedside, and the old man placed his hand upon his head.

"God bless you, my boy, and give you strength to do your duty, and when you lay at the point of death, as I do now, may you be able to look back upon the past, and call up in your mind the memory of your deeds without one blush of shame, or one single regret. Bless you, bless you, my noble boy."

Walter Nixon arose to his feet, and his eyes were filled with bright tears. He held his father's hand in his own, and for several moments the deep emotions of his soul checked his utterance.

"Never, never," at length murmured the youth, "shall the precepts of my father be for-

gotten. His life has been bright, his words have been full of wisdom, and I will follow the examples that shall cluster around his sacred memory."

The old man gazed fondly upon his son, but he seemed too weak to speak. The excitement of the forenoon had kept his spirits up, but now the physical man was fast giving way. His eyes grew heavy, and the lids began to settle.

"Hush!" he uttered, with a startling accent. "Heard you not that distant noise?"

"Yes, yes, father—it is the report of our minute-men's muskets and rifles. The retreating enemy are falling by the wayside."

"Hark! Again! again! Hear them, hear them, Walter! O, America—my country! God protect thee! My boy, where are you?"

"Here, here, father," softly returned the youth, as he bent over his dying parent.

"Lay your hand upon my brow. There. — Remember your country, my son, and remember your father. Ha! hear our muskets! How they speak out for freedom! God grant that such may ever be the tones that shall thunder in the ears of all tyrants!"

As the old patriot ceased speaking, he raised himself convulsively upon his elbow and lifted his hand on high. His lips parted, but no sound came forth. A bright spark gleamed for an instant in either eye, but it passed away like the flash of a meteor, and the aged head sank back upon the pillow. Walter Nixon bent low-

er over his father's form, and he placed his ear close to the thin lips, but he heard no breath. He pressed his hand upon the heart, but its pulsations had ceased. There was a waking smile upon the time-worn features of the old patriot, a sort of expression of joyous hope and trust, and there it remained, for the last impressions of the soul upon that face had been fixed by the hand of death!

Walter Nixon did not weep, for he had been prepared for his father's death; and, moreover, he knew that the soul which had been called away was well-fitted for a higher sphere than earth. The son dropped a tear upon the cold brow, but it was the messenger of calm affection, and silently did he renew the vow he had already taken.

Silently stood the young man and the physician and gazed upon the face of the dead. Nothing broke the stillness of that room—save the report of the distant musketry, as it came borne upon the breeze—as for a long time neither of them spoke.

"He has gone," at length whispered Walter.

"Yes, but he has left a memory behind that can never die," returned the doctor.

Walter replied not, for the words of his father came upon him, and his mind leaped forward into the future. He heard the crack of the provincial rifles, and he knew that the strife wherein he was to figure had begun. *The Revolution had opened upon America!*

## CHAPTER II.

## PLANS FOR A CAPTURE—THE BOY-PATRIOT.

THE spring and summer of 1775 had passed away, and a cool autumn had well nigh opened into the frosts of winter. The people of New England had now fairly awakened to a full sense of their situation; and they had almost made up their minds to bid open defiance to the royal authority without longer hesitation, and declare themselves a free and independent people. It had taken many deeds of wrong, many acts of injustice, and long and bitter tyranny, to drive them to this end. The colonists were not so easily induced to rebel against the rule of England as most people imagine. Many seem to think that the American colonists had laid their plans for rebellion very early, and that their only aim was to establish their own government because they felt strong enough to do so. Such is not the fact. The colonists for a long time only sought to defend their dearest rights of property, and they fondly hoped that they might be able to once more enjoy their peaceful privileges beneath the government of England, and it was not until long after the blood had been washed away from the greensward of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker

Hill, that the idea of an AMERICAN REPUBLIC was entertained by the people. Some men, to be sure, with prophetic vision, had foretold the event as inevitable, but few dared to give the thought a home in their bosoms. When, finally, the colonies as a body politic took up arms against the mother country, it was because they had been most cruelly forced to the step; but when once that step was taken, England found that she had awakened a young lion that could never again be tamed into submission to despotism.

The Assembly had taken up the subject of authorizing private individuals to fit out vessels on their own account against the English, and an act on the subject was passed, making provision for the equipment of privateers, simply placing them under certain wholesome restrictions, and making arrangements for the fair distribution of prizes. Many enterprising seamen, who had been thrown out of employment by that most infamous of all British acts, the Boston Port Bill, and by the various blockades, had long been engaged in the privateering business. It was near the close of the day. The small

puddles in the streets of Newburyport were crusted over with ice, and the air was chilly and piercing. Upon one of the wharves at the northeastern extremity of the town stood three young men, all of them powerful looking fellows, who were habited in seamen's garbs, with rough pea-jackets buttoned close up to their chins. They were gazing intently towards the point where the passage between Plum Island and the main land opens to the Atlantic, and there, in full sight, with all her sails set, was a brig standing in, with the red flag of England at her peak.

"She's a beauty, Nixon," said the elder of the three men.

"She is, truly," returned the man thus addressed, who was none other than Walter Nixon, a personage already in the reader's acquaintance. "She is a handsome craft, Baker, and with a little alteration would make a fast sailer, and a craft easy to be handled."

"I know not that she needs altering. She must be a good sailer as she is."

"She is doubtless a good sailer," returned Nixon, as he watched the handsome brig; "but there are more in Boston harbor as good as she is. We must have a vessel that the British cannot beat. Don't you see? Her rigging has the old English stiffness to it. Her masts put me in mind of an old school-mistress that once superintended my youthful ideas. All day long she used to sit bolt upright in her seat like a gun-deck stanchion, as though to bend a point would have sprung her back. I would have those masts rake more by eight degrees, at least; and then look at her bowsprit. It looks as though they were afraid of wetting the foot of the jib. I'd gammon that down just about ten degrees lower."

"I tell you what, Baker," said he who had not before spoken; "that would make a difference in the craft, and no mistake."

"Yes, it would," returned Baker. "And now, captain," he continued, turning to Nixon, "what is the next move?"

"That depends upon how long the brig is going to remain off the harbor."

"O, I have found that out."

"And what is it?" asked Nixon, with much earnestness.

"She has orders to lay off and on here for a week yet. The British found out that we had a lot of stores here, and it seems they are determined that we shan't get them out, so the brig is going to blockade us."

"Then our way is clear enough," said Nixon, in a confident tone. "We must capture her. Our crew are all ready, and we must find some work for them to do."

Baker and Cummings both shook their heads and looked dubiously.

"Rather a ticklish job," ventured the latter.

"So I should think," responded Baker.

"But yet not so hard as you may imagine," said Nixon. "The strong, who depend upon their physical strength alone, are often more easily overcome than the weak who depend upon their cunning. Those fellows have no more cunning than an ostrich, and their strength isn't much to boast of."

"Yet you must admit, Nixon, that that brig is no mere plaything. I was looking at her with my glass this forenoon, and those twelve guns she carries are eighteen-pounders. I can't see how we are to get hold of her."

"Neither do I see it yet, myself," said Nixon, in reply; "but this much I do see, Baker: that for those who are determined there is most generally a way. We have Yankee hearts and Yankee hands, and we will not stop short of the accomplishment of our purpose. That brig has taken my fancy, and I must have her, and I do not believe that my men will shrink from the undertaking. I know them to be brave fellows."

The eyes of both Baker and Cummings kindled with an enthusiastic fire, and grasping their young commander by the hand, they swore to follow him even to the death.

Walter Nixon, after he had paid the last tribute of respect to the earthly remains of his father, and disposed of the small property that had been left to him, determined that his future labors in behalf of his country should be upon

the open sea. He was acquainted with many seamen in Boston, and he had no difficulty in selecting a crew upon whose faith and courage he could depend. John Baker and Benjamin Cummings had both sailed with him in the employ of Samuel Davis, and as he knew them to be, not only excellent seamen, but also men of cool, sound judgment, he had engaged them as his chief officers. Baker was the first mate, and Cummings the second. Besides these, he had sixty men ready to jump at a moment's warning—good stalwort fellows, who feared nothing so long as they felt themselves to be in the right.

"Now when do you propose to commence operations?" asked Baker, as the party turned leisurely up the wharf.

"Perhaps to-morrow night," replied Nixon. "I shall not sleep to-night, until I have devised some means of capturing the Englishman. We shall meet again in the morning, and then I will open to you my plans."

At the head of the wharf the three companions separated, Baker and Cummings starting towards the centre of the town, while Nixon kept along the river road to the eastward.

Neither of them noticed, as they turned at the head of the pier, that their conversation had been all overheard, but after they had got out of sight, a boy moved stealthily away from behind a pile of boards, and letting himself down into a small skiff that lay thumping against the wharf fenders he skulled across the river.

Walter Nixon reached the small inn where he had been stopping, and after supper he went up to his room, where he sat for a long time and pondered over the subject he had in hand. For two hours he sat in a deep study, but he could not bring his mind to bear upon any plan for the capture of the brig that seemed at all feasible. He knew that he might take her by main force, but then that would endanger too many of his men, and he could not afford to lose his brave fellows when it might as well be avoided. Half a dozen embryo projects had flitted across his mind, but they had been relinquished, and he now found himself without

an idea. The case was harder than he had anticipated. Had he but had even a fishing sloop, with half a dozen twelve-pounders on board, he would have dared the Englishman to his face, but he could raise nothing but small boats.

The young man arose to his feet and began to pace the floor. No fortunate plan, however, came to aid him, and he had almost resolved to go to bed and see if his dreams would not help him, when he was aroused from his nervous thought by a low, quick rap at his door.

"Come in," said he, at the same time placing his hand instinctively in the pocket where he carried a loaded pistol.

It was a boy that entered. He could not have been over fourteen years of age, and he was rather small, even at that. His features were of a regular, comely order, beautiful in their chisellings, and his eyes were bright and piercing, giving to his countenance a look of intelligence seldom met with in one of his years.

"Do you seek me?" asked Nixon, as he regarded the boy with marked interest.

"Is this Captain Nixon?" the boy asked in return, with a voice as clear and soft as the notes of a linnet.

"My name is Nixon."

The young visitor gazed about him, and then drew nearer to Walter.

"You were down on the wharf this afternoon?" he said.

Nixon started, but in a moment he thought how easy it might have been for any one to have seen him as he came up, and he replied in the affirmative.

The boy gazed about him again, and then he cast his eyes upon the floor.

"Have you any errand for me?" asked Nixon, as he noticed that his youthful visitor seemed undecided as to what course he should pursue.

The boy started and looked anxiously up into Walter's face.

"I have come here of my own accord, sir," he said at length; "and, perhaps, I can be of service to you. At least, I hope I can, for I have run no little risk in coming."

"And in what way do you propose to assist me?" inquired Nixon, not a little puzzled to imagine what the boy could know about him.

"You wish to take the English brig that—"

"Sdeath, boy! how learned you that?" interrupted Walter, as he laid his hand with a nervous grasp upon the boy's arm. "Who told you that? None of my men can have betrayed me?"

"You need not be afraid," said the visitor, without moving a muscle of his handsome countenance. "I overheard your conversation on the wharf this afternoon, and if your intentions be such as I think they are, I have come to assist you."

There was something in the boy's manner, and in the sound of his voice, that seemed a guarantee for his honesty. At any rate, Nixon resolved to trust him for the present.

"Well, my lad," he said, "I do intend to take that brig, and if I succeed, she shall hereafter sail for the good of the American colonies."

"Have you thought of any plan yet?"

"No."

"She is a well-armed and well-manned vessel, and one not easily to be captured by anything we have in this harbor."

"You seem to know her well, boy?"

"Yes, sir, I have been on board."

"On board? When?"

"Last night."

"And how did you that? With whom did you go?" asked Nixon, as he regarded his visitor with more curiosity than before.

"It matters not how I went, nor with whom, it is enough that I have been there."

"Then they must have been Tories with whom you went?"

The rich blood mounted to the cheeks and temples of the lad, and his nether lip trembled with a strong emotion. For a moment his lids drooped, but he soon regained his wonted composure, and while a latent spark burned in his eye, he said:

"Of course they were Tories, and though one of them is a kin of mine, yet I feel not with

them. God knows that I love my country too well for that. I am young—yet a mere boy—and though my heart may not be so large as some, nor so wise, still what there is of it, is American, and if it has one cord of affection stronger than another, that cord binds it to the land of my birth, and to the freedom of the colonies. No, no—there is one other object I love better—an object that depends upon me for all of happiness it finds on earth. Yet, sir, I love my country, and I hate its enemies, now and ever."

He wiped a single tear from his long lashes as he closed, and as he now gazed into Nixon's face the latter felt that he could trust him. God could not have made such a face as that for the seat of duplicity. Walter caught the boy by the hand, and with a beaming face he uttered:

"God bless you, my boy; and may you be spared to live long for the country we both love. What is your name?"

"Gideon Ryan."

"Ryan?" repeated Walter, in a thoughtful mood. "There is an old Tory by that—"

"Say no more, sir," quickly interrupted the boy, while a painful look passed over his face. "The man to whom you allude, is my father. Now you know all. I am not to blame that he is a Tory, though the thought is saddening. But now to the brig. I must be expeditious, for I have to recross the river to-night, and no one must know where I have been. This is the first opportunity that I have had to do the colonists a service, and I was determined not to lose it, and in this I do a double work."

"There are few, my young lad, who will have done a greater service than yourself," said Walter, who had now begun to feel a warm affection for the boy. "You say you have been on board the brig. Did you ascertain how many men she had?"

"Yes, sir. She has fifty-eight, all told."

"That's good, if there are no more."

"That is her full complement, sir, I am sure, for I heard the captain say so."

"Now to your plan," said Nixon, as he set a chair for the boy, and took one himself.



"I have no plan, exactly," returned Gideon; "but I can give you a piece of intelligence that will at once enable you to form a plan to suit yourself. But first, you must give me your solemn promise that you will not betray me—that you will not mention to a living soul how you gained your intelligence."

"The pledge is yours, my noble boy. I will not lisp it."

"And you will not betray my father, for were the people of Newburyport to know the part he is acting, I fear they would tear our house down about our ears."

"You may trust me. I will not mention your father's name."

"Then, sir," arrangements have been made for a small party of tories to go off to the brig to-morrow night. There is a sort of tory league here, at the head of which stands my father, and they have been collecting intelligence with regard to the military stores between here and Salem, and also with regard to the disposition of the people and the plans of the provincials, all of which they are to make known to the captain of the brig. A tory spy has gone to Salem, another is operating in Danvers, and one has gone on as far as Lynn, and they are to return to-morrow evening. There is no particular time set for them to board the brig, but, at any rate, they are not to go before midnight. Everything has been arranged particularly. At the first hail from the brig, the tories were to fire three pistols, very slightly loaded, in quick succession to the southward. At the next hail, they are directed to give the countersign, which is '*Buckingham*,' and then they were to go on board without further ceremony. If your men have spirit and determination, I should think you might take the Englishman without much trouble. The brig will heave-to at midnight just around the head of Plum Island, and as I am confident that the tories will not be prepared to set out before one o'clock, you will have plenty of time."

Walter Nixon's face was lighted up by a joyous look, and he started from his chair and grasped the boy by the hand:

Gideon Ryan," he uttered, "I know that you are not deceiving me. I shall trust you, and you shall be rewarded for your information. Here, take this purse, and at some future —"

"Put up your money, sir," interrupted the boy, while a crimson flush passed over his countenance. "I do not *sell* my love to my country. Every son and daughter of America owe their strength and will to the welfare of the land. If I have enabled you to strike an effective blow for freedom I shall have reward enough. But I must leave you now, and all I hope is, that you may succeed."

"Stop, stop," exclaimed Nixon, as the boy turned to go. "I must know where I can find you. I would know more of you."

"It can matter little to you where I live," returned Gideon. "If we meet again, it will be by accident, or when I have more intelligence to communicate, and you are by to receive it."

"I should think one like you would love the deck of a clipper privateer. I would give you a comfortable berth if you would but go with me."

"O, how I should like such a life! How my heart would bound could I but join in your warfare; but I cannot—I have a charge I must not forsake. Trust me, sir, you will find all about the brig as I have stated. God grant that you may be successful, and I beg that you will remember me as one who has done all that laid in his power for the good of his country. Farewell."

Walter Nixon sprang forward, but the boy had glided from the room, and his feet were heard pattering upon the stairs.

The young man once more paced the room in thoughtful silence. His thoughts were about equally divided between the brig and the strange youth who had just left him. That there was something remarkable about the boy he felt sure, and he was almost startled himself when he felt what an interest he had taken in the lad's affairs. Ere long, however, he sought his rest, and though he endeavored to bend every energy of his mind to the subject of his intended capture, yet the mild features of that boy-patriot would haunt him.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE OLD BRICK-MAKER—PLANS FOR THE ATTACK.

EARLY the next morning, Walter Nixon was up and stirring. As soon as he had swallowed an early breakfast he set off in quest of his two officers, whom he soon found, and taking them to a private place, where their conversation could not be heard, he explained to them all that had transpired since they parted the evening before. Both the mates were favorably startled at the revelation, and for several moments they pondered in silence upon what they had heard.

"Captain Nixon," said Baker, with a half-doubtful expression upon his countenance; "may not this be some trap to catch us? I don't like this tory part of the affair."

"A trap!" almost indignantly uttered Nixon, forgetting for the moment that neither of his officers had seen the boy-messenger. "No, I will stake my very life on the integrity of him who brought me the intelligence. A trap! Why, you must be beside yourself, Baker. If it were a trap, I am thinking that they who set it would first get their fingers in it. You know that the dastard tories would not dare to molest us, and as for the crew of that brig, I believe

we outnumber them. Let me once get my foot on the Englishman's deck, and their craft is mine."

"And we'll join you," cried both the mates.

"I knew you would. And now we must be about our preparations. You go and hunt up the men and have them in readiness to attend us as soon as it is dark. See that their pistols and cutlasses are ready, and that nothing be wanting to have them punctual. Above all things, impress upon them the necessity of strictly avoiding spirituous drinks during the day, for I would not have a man with us who was at all disguised with liquor. One such man might do more damage than a dozen stout arms could repair. We want clear heads and steady hands. I am going now to make such preparations as I can, and I will meet you again this noon, or, at any rate, before three o'clock."

Baker and Cummings promised to have all in readiness as requested, and with light hearts they went about their duty, while their young commander, after having buttoned his coat snugly about him to keep out the cold blast, started off towards the river.

Nixon easily procured a boat, but he declined the assistance of any one to help him row across, preferring to go by himself. As soon as he reached the opposite shore he hauled the boat up out of the way of the tide, and then took his way further up the river towards a deep, wide basin, where there were a number of brick-yards. In this basin lay four large scows, which were used for bringing clay and wood down the river, and also for carrying bricks further down towards the island when vessels could not handily get up. The man who owned the yards was a short, thick-set, rough looking old fellow, and he looked at the new-comer with anything but an inviting cast of countenance.

"Do you own these scows, sir?" asked Walter, as he approached the owner of the yards.

"Yes, s'pose I do," grunted the old fellow.

"Would you be willing to lend one of them to-night?" continued Nixon, nothing daunted.

"And never get it agin, I s'pose."

"It shall be returned faithfully in the morning, sir."

"O, yes, of course. That's what folks allers says as intends to run away. I'd like to know what in thunder you want to go scouting about in one o' them great heavy things for?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, my good man."

"Don't *good-man* me. I aint any better than other folks. You can't tickle me out of my scows in that way."

"Just hear my proposition," said Walter, with a smile, for he saw that beneath all the old man's roughness there was a rich vein of real goodness. "I want to use one of your scows to-night, and if you will let me have it I will place in your hands any sum that you will say your boat is worth. Is not that fair?"

"Anything's fair enough now-a-days," returned the old man, with a little softer expression in his tone.

"Then what is one of your scows worth—say that one with the short mast stepped forward, there?"

"They aint worth nothin', any on 'em. They aint of no more use than se many hig-

rocks. Nobody's buildin' brick housens now 'cept the British, an' I'd see them dod-rotted afore I'd make 'em a brick. I can't git a cargo into Boston since the infernal red-coats have squatted there on our native sile, nor I can't even run a cargo out o' the port now, just for that sneakin' puppy of a Britisher that's layin' off an' on, out in the offen'. Blast 'em, I say!"

Walter saw at once with whom he had to deal, and he knew that the brick-maker could be trusted.

"If you will lend me one of your scows to-night," he said, "that English brig shall lay in the port to-morrow, with the Yankee flag flying at her peak."

"Eh! What!" uttered the old man, starting into new life. "Take that brig with one o' my scows?"

"Yes, sir—I have sixty-two as brave fellows as ever swung a cutlass or cocked a pistol, and if I can get something large enough to carry us all out together, I'll make a Yankee privateer of that brig before she's a week older."

"Well, as for that matter, there's room enough in one o' them scows for two hundred men to dance a hornpipe; but what does that signify? Them British guns 'd blow you out o' the water afore you could get within pistol shot o' 'em."

"I've got that matter all arranged, and I know I can get alongside without being fired at. I shall risk my head, at any rate; but I don't want to endanger your property, so I will deposit in your hands such a sum as a new scow is worth, and then if it gets riddled you wont be a loser."

"Do you really, actually, 'pon honor, mean that you are goin' to take that brig?"

"Do I look like a man that would tell a falsehood?"

"No, bake me in a brick-kiln if you do."

"Then you will accede to my proposal?"

"No, I wont! But you shall have the scow, though—all of 'em if you want; an' if you can just git that cussed Britisher, you may blow the whole lot on 'em into inch splinters, and I'll go

to work and make new ones. You can have it just when you want it, and I'll be here to help you off. Jehoshaphat! ef you do take that brig an' hist the Yankee flag on her, wont the tarnal old king be mad. How I should love to see him rave."

Walter could not but smile at the old man's quaint enthusiasm, though he revered the noble spirit of self-sacrifice that prompted it. The brick-maker went down with him to the scow he had pointed out, and our hero found that it was just what he wanted. It had a stump mast stepped forward, with a square sail all ready for hoisting.

"You'll have the wind abaft the beam to-night," said the old man, as Nixon asked about the management of the scow. "You see this wind is nor'-west, an' it'll hold so; an' you'll have the tide in your favor, too. I've run this old thing clean way to Salem with a load of bricks when the wind was fair. O, she'll handle as easy as old Tilley."

The brick-maker procured a lot of old mats and gunny-bags, which he placed in the scow, and he promised that he would be on hand to help her off when she was wanted, and, moreover, that he would be secret about what was in the wind.

As soon as all was thus satisfactorily arranged, Nixon took his way back to his boat, and recrossed the river, and shortly afterwards he joined his officers, where he learned that the men were all ready the moment they were wanted. In turn he explained the result of his own mission.

"But you don't expect you are going to get alongside with that old scow, do you?" uttered Baker.

"Why, they'll be sure to fire into us the first thing," added Cummings.

"No, no, I have thought of all that," returned Nixon. "A scow is the only thing we can go in. A regular sail-vessel, large enough to carry us all would be sure to excite a suspicion that we might not lull, but with the old scow I am confident we shall pass."

The two officers saw how the matter stood,

and they were satisfied that the arrangement was the best that could have been made, when their commander assured them that he would have an excuse ready for appearing to the Englishman in such a dubious shape.

The day passed slowly away, and at length the dusky shades of night settled down over the town. There was no moon, and a light fog that had swept in from the sea and hung itself overhead, almost shut out the stars. It was not uncommonly dark, but yet so dark that objects could not be distinguished at any distance over a rod or two. At nine o'clock the men were all collected on the bank of the river at the western extremity of the village, and they evinced by their manners, and by the tones of their whispers, that they were eager for the onset. Each man had his cutlass securely buckled, and his carefully loaded pistols safely at hand out of the dampness, and as they saw the confident mien of their commander, the word "*fail*" intruded itself not upon their minds, but they looked upon the blockading brig of the enemy as already their own.

Nixon took twelve of his men with him, and entering a boat that lay near at hand, he crossed over to the brick-yards. The old brick-maker was in waiting, and it took but a short time to get the old scow out into the stream. The mats and gunny-bags were all on board, and the kind owner had thoroughly cleaned out the bottom of the craft, so that the men might lie down without soiling themselves. As the wind set almost directly across the river, the sail was not hoisted, and having received the brick-maker's hearty godspeed, they got out the poles and started back. The wind set them across to a point only a few rods below where their companions stood, and all having got on board, the head of the scow was shoved off, the sail hoisted, the sheet trimmed, and the quaint old bark began to move sluggishly through the water.

It was a little past eleven o'clock when they reached the little island at the mouth of the river, and here Nixon resolved to stop until nearly midnight, so the bows were allowed to run up among the shrubbery that skirted the



sandy shore, and as soon as she was thus safely grounded, Walter went around among the men to assure himself that everything was as it should be. After he was satisfied on this point, he called Baker and Cummings to his side, and crossed over to the eastern side of the island.

"Ha!" exclaimed Cummings, who got the first look seaward, "there she is, waiting for us."

Nixon and Baker looked in the direction pointed out, and just over the head of Plum Island they saw a red light which they at once knew must belong to the brig. They watched it for nearly ten minutes, and from the gradual motion which it made to the southward and eastward they knew that the brig was laying-to.

At half past eleven the men were all in the scow again, and once more she was put off. They now had the wind nearly astern, and the old square sail lugged them along after the most approved fashion.

"Now, my brave boys," said Walter, as he stood up in the stern, "you must be preparing. I have selected the five men who are to help me manage our craft, and the remainder of you must lie down snugly in the bottom of the scow and cover yourselves over with the mats and gunny-bags. Be sure and lay so that you can leap to your feet in an instant, and as soon as you feel the scow grate against the side of the brig gather yourselves up for the spring; but don't move to your feet until I give the word. Remember, now, we may have to fight pretty hard, but I am not afraid to trust you. Think of our homes and our hearth-stones, and show to the dastard invaders that we want no foreign foe upon our waters or upon our soil. Look well to your pistols, and have your cutlasses loose. Remember Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill; but mind you, my men, don't destroy any more lives than you can possibly avoid."

There was a parting of lips, and an almost audible beating of hearts, but the men restrained the utterance of their enthusiasm, and set about preparing themselves as they had been directed. Nixon went round among them after

they had laid down, and smoothed over their coverings, and as soon as all was arranged to his satisfaction he again took charge of the helm.

Slowly the old scow poked along through the water, and at length the head of the island was rounded. Here the wind was lighter upon the low sail, and though they now crept along only at a snail's pace, yet they were in time.

"Run forward, Cummings; and see if you can make out her hull, for I can't tell whether she's got her light at the fore or main."

The second mate was gone about five minutes.

"Yes," he replied, as he came aft; "I can make her out plainly. — There, you can see her now from here. That light is at her main truck, and she is laying-to on the larboard tack with her courses hauled up, and her maintop-sail aback, heading, as near as I can judge, about nor'-nor'-east."

"Stand by, now, to grasp hold of her chains," said Nixon, in a low tone. "I am going to run down, upon her larboard bow and then keep my luff and fall along upon her weather side. Stand by the sheets, one of you."

"Boat, ahoy!" at this moment came in a sharp, quick tone from the brig.

"Let go your pistols," uttered Nixon, and in another moment three pistols, one after the other, were fired to the southward.

"Boat, ahoy!" again came from the brig.

"Buckingham!" shouted Nixon.

"Ay, ay," said the same voice from the brig.

In a moment, however, there was a perceptible commotion on the deck of the Englishman; loud voices were heard, and in a short time half a dozen lanterns flashed over the side.

"Hallo, there! keep off with that lumbering thing," yelled a voice. "Who are you?"

"Lower the sail," ordered Walter, to one of his men, and then turning towards the brig he said, in a voice perfectly calm and collected:

"Do you not know us? Is not the signal of recognition correct?"

"Your signal is correct enough, but what are

you doing out here with such a floating battery as that? Keep off, or I'll fire into you."

As the sail was lowered the low sides of the scow caught none of the wind that came over the island, and she hardly moved through the water, though there was a little headway still setting her on.

"I'm afraid we are dished," whispered Baker. "If they fire into us they'll sink us as sure as fate."

"Never fear," returned Walter. "They won't fire."

"Hallo," he continued, addressing the officer of the brig.

"Well, what is it?"

"We had to come in this thing, or else not come at all. The rebels suspected our movements and they stole our boats. I have something important from Salem to communicate, so I determined to come at all hazards."

"That isn't Ryan's voice," cried the Englishman. "Where is he? None of your infernal Yankee fooling, now."

For a moment, Nixon hesitated. He had not anticipated this dilemma, but his wits soon came to his assistance.

"Ryan is here, but he went to Salem yesterday, and last night he rode nearly the whole of the night on horseback in the cold damp air, and he has got such a hoarseness that he can hardly speak at all; but he has the papers all ready, with such intelligence as he could gain all written out."

For some moments there seemed to be a consultation going on upon the fore-castle of the brig, and the Americans could see by the occasional flashes of the lights through the port-holes that her men were hurrying up from be-

low, and it was soon apparent that nearly the whole of the crew were upon the deck. This was rather unfortunate, for it betokened that there must be a pretty equal contest, and our hero had no particular desire to lose too many of his men.

"I'm afraid they won't let us board," whispered Cummings.

"Then we'll board without their letting," calmly returned Nixon. "We can run under her bows so that they can't bring but one gun to bear upon us at any rate."

"Come alongside," cried the captain of the brig.

The hearts of the Americans leaped with excited joy as they heard the summons, and deep-drawn, heavy breaths were heard from beneath the mats and bags. The scow was now more than half her own length from the brig, and she had got worked around so that she was heading directly along under the other's weather beam. A couple of sweeps were got out, and in a few moments the scow's head grated against the Englishman's bend. The bags and mats began to move, and a slight scratching noise was perceptible, somewhat such as a tiger would make while gathering itself for a leap. Four of the men who were standing up caught hold of the fore-chains, and walked their lumbering craft smoothly alongside.

"What you got in them bags? Where's old Ryan? Who are you? Death and fu—"

The Englishman smelt a rat, but his ejaculation was cut short by the stentorian voice of the young American commander.

"Now, my men! Leap! Board! Clear the way as you go, and make room for those behind!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CONFLICT—THE TIMELY RECRUIT.

LIKE so many lions sprang the American seamen from their hiding-places, and quick as the leap of the chamois they went pouring in over the low sides of the brig. The English were thunderstruck, and though many of them were armed, yet they fell back into the lee gangway like a pack of frightened sheep. It seemed to them as though the Americans were being vomited forth from the bosom of the ocean, and they knew not the character or disposition of the foe. It seems the idea of some sort of a "Yankee trick," had faintly dawned upon their minds, but they had entertained not the least idea that the old scow contained such a formidable enemy.

"Who are you? What do you want?" uttered the English captain, who had backed to the main life-rail, and stood there trembling like an aspen.

"We are Americans, and we want this brig," returned Walter; "so the sooner you surrender the better."

"What! surrender one of his majesty's brigs to a pack of Yankee pirates? Never!"

"Then we must force you to it; but God

knows who are the pirates. Have you not murdered our citizens? Have you not destroyed our stores, burned our houses, trampled down our grain, shut up our ports, and beggared our innocent children? Lay down your own sword, sir, and order your men to lay down their weapons also. If you do that, your lives shall be spared."

"And what if I do not?" said the Englishman, as he began to recover his scattered courage, seeing the youthful appearance of the American commander.

"Then you must fight for your brig."

"Let into 'em!" whispered Cummings.

"Don't let 'em get prepared, for we can take 'em now at a vantage."

"Forward, my men!" shouted Walter.

"Strike down everything that opposes you, but strike none who lay down their arms. Pistols! Draw them!"

As the young man spoke, he dashed forward towards the life-rail. The English captain sprang upon his guard and drew a pistol, but quick as thought it was dashed from his hand, and in an instant a keen sword-point was gleaming at his breast.

"If you raise your sword an inch, my weapon shall pierce you through and through!" uttered Walter. "Lay it down! Drop it!"

For an instant the Englishman was undecided as to what course it was best to pursue. Whatever courage he may have had was at stake, and his life was in the same predicament. He cast a hasty glance about him to see if any of his men were coming to his assistance, but he satisfied himself in an instant, that they had rather more than they could comfortably attend to, to take care of themselves.

"Are you going to lay down your sword?" asked Nixon, in a stern, threatening tone.

The Englishman's nether lip trembled—his hand unloosed its hold, and the sword, with its pommelled head of the proud British lion, fell rattling upon the deck.

"You are a wise man," said Walter, and as he spoke, he seized the end of the weather main-buntline, and taking three tight turns around the captain's body and arms, he belayed it to the life-rail.

As soon as this was accomplished, Nixon sprang to the gangway, but he found that his arm was not needed. At the first order of their young commander, the Americans had all drawn their pistols and presented them, and this movement gave them the decided advantage, as there were not a dozen pistols on the other side. There had been some hard fighting, but it was of short duration, more than half of the Englishmen having laid down their cutlasses when the boarders first advanced. A few stout Britons fought desperately, but they fought against men who sought to throw the yoke of tyranny from their shoulders, and gradually, after four of their number had fallen, they fell back towards the quarter-deck, and threw down their arms.

The brig was carried, and the Americans now stood upon their own deck!

The lanterns, by the light of which the battle had been fought, still stood safely upon the hatches, and Nixon bade some of his men take three of them.

"Where is the master-at-arms?" asked he.

"I am that officer," answered an Englishman, stepping forward from his companions.

"Then go below with my men, and show them where the irons are."

In a short time the men returned loaded with hand and foot irons, and the Americans commenced placing them upon their prisoners, and ere long the ruffled Englishmen were laid away in the scuppers to await further orders.

Upon examination, it was found that the Americans had lost two men, and that three more were slightly wounded, while the English had six killed, besides some dozen or so who had been cut upon the hands and arms.

Just as the deck had been cleared up, one of the men who stood near the weather bow, reported a boat just under the fore-foot.

"Boat, ahoy!" shouted Walter, as he sprang forward upon the fore-castle.

Three pistol shots were returned from the boat.

"Boat, ahoy!"

"*Buckingham!*" returned the boat.

"Then *Buckingham* yourselves back into the port!" shouted Walter, while his men laughed at the peculiar fix of the old Tories.

"What's that you say?" asked a voice from the approaching boat, in tones of utter astonishment.

"Start your old Tory carcasses back from whence you came. You can't come on board here. Man the main braces, boys, and fill away the main-topsail. Quick! Look out there in that boat, or you'll be run down."

"Let's fire into 'em," said the excited Cummings.

"No, no," quickly returned Walter; "I would not do that on any account. Tories though they be, yet they have unintentionally done us a favor, for it was through their means that we got on board the brig so easily."

"Hollo! Brig ahoy! I want to come on board! I've got news for you," shouted from the boat, in frantic accents.

"Then keep it."

"But I'm *Silas Ryan!*"

"Then may the ocean swallow you for an unmitigated old scoundrel, and be hanged to you."

"Hallo-o-o-o--"

But the old tory cried out in vain. The brig had gathered a good headway, and in a few moments the boat was left bobbing up and down in her wake, and the last faint "o-o-o-o" died away upon the breeze, as the tory crew were lost in the darkness.

"Hope you wont be offended at the way we treat the company you invited to visit you," remarked Nixon, as he approached the spot where the English captain sat upon a shot-box.

"Then Ryan did not betray us?" said the captain, seeming to take no notice of Walter's sarcastic remark.

"No, sir, not he. He's too fond of English gold for that."

"Then how learned you that signal?"

"Dreamed part of it, and guessed the other part. We Yankees are great for guessing."

The Englishman bit his lips and looked offended.

"What do you intend to do with the brig?" he at length asked.

"Mean to put a few Yankee improvements on her, and then use her for a chopping-knife."

"Eh? What?"

"Use her to chop up your king's transports and store-ships with, I mean."

"How will you have her run, Captain Nixon?" asked Baker, coming up at this moment.

Walter left the side of the crest-fallen Englishman and went to the wheel, and after calculating a moment, he said:

"You may get the courses on her, Mr. Baker, and we'll stand on this tack, until we can make a straight leg into the port. See that all the rigging is ready and clear for running."

The wind still held from the northward and westward, and the brig was not long in making a point from whence she could easily stand into the harbor, and long before daylight her anchors were dropped in the mud off the Merrimac river, her sails snugly furled, and all made ready for warping her up to one of the wharves in the morning.

When at length the bright sun arose, sending its beams to glance at the frost and glitter-

ing icicles, the few people who were stirring were not a little startled at seeing the English brig at anchor off the town, but in a moment more they noticed that the proud flag of England was only at half-mast, and above it, gallantly waving in the breeze, floated the flag of the colonies, with its pure white field, its pine tree of bright green, and its significant motto—"APPEAL TO HEAVEN!"

Those who saw it shouted for joy, and as the sound of their glad voices went ringing through the town, other people crowded down to the wharves and saw the glad sight, and in less than an hour, nearly the whole of the population, old and young, male and female, were collected by the river side.

A boat was let down from the brig's side, and as it started for the shore, another boat—a light, flat wherry—was seen to shoot out from the cove wherein stood old Jacob Maynard's brick-yards. It was pulled by a single man, and it came skipping over the water as though it had a score or two of double-action propellers at its stern. Both boats reached the wharf at the same time. Walter Nixon leaped out of the first, and Jacob Maynard from the second.

The old man sprang eagerly forward, and grasping the young hero by the hand, he exclaimed:

"By the great butt end of creation, you ought to be made a governor for this. Got her, didn't ye?"

"Yes, yes, my kind old friend," returned Walter, with a smile; "I've got her, and there she lays; but I'm afraid I've lost your scow. When we boarded the brig she fell off, and I lost her in the dark; but you shan't—"

"Hooray!" yelled the old brick-maker, at the same time waving his hat frantically in the air. "I'm glad the old scow's gone, for now old Jake Maynard can say that he did something towards taking the prize, can't he?"

"Yes, you can, most assuredly," returned Walter, "for if it hadn't been for your help, that brig wouldn't have been in here now."

The old man dashed his hat upon the ground and fairly danced with delight, but he was not alone in his quaint and wild demonstrations of

joy, for many a sober citizen laid aside the dignity of age, and became gleesome and merry.

Walter had come on shore to seek the owner of the dock-yard, and he had no difficulty in finding him, for he had been among the first to come down to the wharf. Arrangements were soon made for having the prize hauled upon the ways, and then the young commander went off to the brig, taking the old brick-maker with him. For some time after Jacob Maynard placed his feet upon the deck of the prize he gazed about him in an absorbed silence. Gradually a strong light broke over his sunburned countenance, and he shoved both hands deep down into the pockets of his pea-jacket, as if to secure an idea that had struck him.

"Cap'n Nixon," said he, slowly approaching the spot where the young man stood, "I've spent a good deal of my life on the old salt pond, an' now I should just like to try it once more. I haint got a chick nor child in the world, nor my wife haint, nother. Haint you got room here for one more? I do want to strike the tarnal old king one blow afore they lay this old hull away in the ground."

"Do you mean that you want to join our crew?" asked Walter, as his eyes beamed with pleasure, for the old man's frame betrayed a gathering of muscle and sinew that might not be easily overcome.

"I do just want to do that thing, an' if you'll say the word, you shall find that the British wont find a boy in me to play with. Eh, old rough-an'-tumble?"

This last sentence was directed to the English captain, who had given utterance to a low growl at Maynard's questionable allusion to the British king.

"You shall be one of us, with all my heart," exclaimed Walter, as he grasped the old man's hand. "We lost two brave fellows last night, and unless your looks belie you, you will make up for both of them."

"Then I'm a regular Yankee man-o'-war-man."

"A pirate," growled the English captain.

"Shut up, old lop-tail. None o' your impudence to a Yankee freeman."

As Maynard spoke, he placed his great brawny fist close to the Englishman's nose, and snapped his teeth as though he was calculating whether to eat him or not. The prisoner seemed to think it prudent to hold his tongue, and old Jake left him, to take a look at the rest of the "clipped birds," his prisoners.

The Yankee crew were not a little pleased at the acquisition which had thus been made to their number, for they saw, in the short, massive frame, and in the Herculean shoulders of the brick-maker, a man who would be valuable, and then, too, the very spirit with which he came, recommended him to their respect.

The brig's launch was got out, the kedg anchor put on board, a sufficient quantity of cable coiled away in her, and then she put off up the river, and let go the kedg a few rods above a point opposite to the dock where she was to be hauled in. The vessel was soon walked up to the spot—then a line was sent ashore, and having hoisted the anchor, she was easily warped into the desired place.

Many of the richest merchants came down and offered the loan of any sums that might be needed, and run the risk, promising never to call for a penny unless it could be spared as well as not. Walter availed himself of their offer, for it was found, upon measurement, that the brig would stand much heavier spars, and that she might thus be made to spread one third more canvass. Men were at once set to work making the necessary alterations.

Just after the brig had been hauled into the dock, Walter noticed a party of six men come down upon the bank on the opposite side of the river, where they stood for some time and gazed at the Yankee's prize. Our hero could see their earnest gesticulations, and even at that distance he could not fail to mark the wonder and surprise they exhibited.

He knew it was the old tory and his league, and as they turned away and disappeared among the shrubbery, the young American champion felt in his heart a bitterness of loathing that ripe tyranny could never have caused.

## CHAPTER V.

A THRILLING INCIDENT—THE OLD TORY'S DAUGHTER.

THE brig progressed rapidly towards her completion, and Walter found no lack of help. Even the little boys had the Promethean spark of republicanism glowing in their bosoms, and in many things they were of much service. The girls, too—bright-eyed, buxom lasses—endeavored to outvie each other in their assistance to the Yankee crew.

It was the third day after the brig had been hauled into the dock. The men were engaged upon a portion of the work that did not require Walter's immediate attendance, and he resolved to take a gun and cross the river in quest of game. Perhaps he hoped that he might come across the boy-patriot, for said boy had occupied a large share of his thoughts, since the night on which first he met him. It was quite early when he set out, and having reached the opposite side of the river, he stopped a moment to get the exact bearing of the sun with regard to the town, so that he might not get his head turned in winding around through the woods, and then he struck off into the bushes.

The day was remarkably warm and comfortable for the season, the wind being light from

the southwest, and it promised, as soon as the sun should gain a higher altitude, to be almost like spring. The woods were pretty clear from underbrush, and without much difficulty, young Nixon worked his way about. In two hours he had shot half a dozen partridges and quite a number of woodcocks, and as he was considering whether to return or try his luck further, he observed a place through the trees where there seemed to be some sort of an opening. He brought his gun to his shoulder and started for the spot, but he had not gone more than a dozen steps when the sound of music fell upon his ear. At first it sounded like a soft flute, but as he came nearer he became convinced that it was a human voice. For a few moments he stopped to listen. It was a low, plaintive tune, poured out in soft, liquid notes, but the words were undistinguishable.

After standing for a minute or two to hearken, Walter Nixon moved carefully forward. The opening he had discovered, was a moss-covered spot where a huge rock of granite, ledge-like and shelving, arose from the earth. Upon a little mossy bank, where the warm rays of the

sun shone in, sat the songstress. She was weaving a wreath of evergreen, the vines of which crept along at her feet, and as she plied her fingers she continued to sing. She did not notice the approach of the intruder, and consequently he had a good opportunity to watch her movements.

Walter thought he had never seen a female so beautiful, and he stood and gazed like one entranced. She might have been the suns of seventeen summers, but they had left her with a light, delicate frame, graceful and airy in its proportions, and beautiful in its mouldings. Her features were as soft and musical in their harmony, as were the notes she was uttering, and their pencillings were as fine and graceful as the pure white rose. Her hair, which was of a sunny hue, though not curling into ringlets, was floating over her snow-white shoulders in wavy tresses like the sinuosities of a babbling brooklet. One little foot peeped out from beneath her dress, and Walter could see that the shoe which covered it was well-worn and unfit for that cool season of the year. As she sat thus there was an undefinable air of placid sadness pervading her whole form. It was not sorrow, nor was it exactly melancholy, but it seemed a sort of calm, tranquil resignation, as though even the very atmosphere about her were a heaven of calm thought in which she dwelt.

The young man gazed in rapt admiration upon the scene, and he had half inclined his body to step forward, when his eyes fell upon a thing that sent the blood leaping back to his heart. Just at the edge of the mossy bank, and not more than half a yard from where rested the tiny foot, lay a huge rattlesnake, which had evidently just crawled up there! The deadly reptile was stretched along upon the ground like a bending stick, and his burning eyes were fixed upon the face of the girl. In a moment more the warbling maiden moved her hand out and picked up a piece of evergreen. There was a quick, shrill rattle. She started and listened for an instant, but the rattle ceased, and she went on with her work. Perhaps she thought 'twas a locust, and yet 'twas strange she did not see it.

The snake had gathered itself into a compact fold, and its head was raised and thrown back. Walter would have sprung forward, but he dared not, for should the serpent be startled he might strike his fangs into the flesh of the girl ere a step could be taken to arrest him. Higher and still higher, and further back, moved the head of the snake, and the fanged jaw was raised. Walter knew that he was preparing to strike his never-failing blow, and an agony, such as he had never known before, pierced his soul. The fairy weaver had almost wove in the vine she had last plucked, and she would soon reach out for another. Walter dared not even cry out to warn the girl of her danger, for he knew that the reptile would not now unfold himself without striking.

The agony was but for a moment, for the young man started to a sense of the duty that devolved upon him. He raised his musket, carefully, and silently cocked it, and took a deliberate aim. Its report rang out upon the breeze, and a sharp, piercing shriek echoed it. Quicker than thought Walter dropped the smoking gun and sprang forward. The girl had started up and stood trembling like an aspen, and an ashy pallor had overspread her fair features. She had dropped her half-woven wreath, and it lay upon the mangled form of the writhing snake. In a moment our hero saw that the maiden had not been harmed, and clasping his hands together, he fervently uttered:

"Thank God! You are safe!" And as he spoke, his almost powerless hand fell upon the maiden's shoulder.

"Safe?" she tremblingly murmured, starting, and shrinking away from the touch of the intruder.

"Yes, yes, safe! I have shot him. See where his mangled body lays. O, great God! in another moment he would have fastened his poisonous, deadly fangs into your flesh."

The girl uttered a low cry and sank down upon the mossy shelf of the rock.

"What is it, sir?" she asked, in a half hushed, fearful whisper. "Who would have harmed poor Helen Ryan?"

Walter was startled with a new intelligence. He saw now the likeness between the beautiful creature before him and his boy-friend, and he at once comprehended the meaning of some strange words that the boy had dropped.

"Look here, at my feet, fair maiden," returned Walter, as he pointed to where the snake lay. "That serpent which now writhes there in the throes of death, was coiled up and preparing to spring upon you. In another instant he would have struck the death-blow. I knew you could not have seen him, but did you not hear his rattle?"

The girl bent her head, and placed her hand upon her white brow.

"I did hear a shrill rattle, but I did not see him."

"I see not how you could have avoided it," said Walter, in a tone of astonishment. "Once you placed your hand within an inch of his head when you picked a vine of evergreen."

The girl shuddered, and a strange look of sadness passed over her features.

"Ah, kind sir," she uttered, in a low, tuneful voice, as she once more arose to her feet; "the eyes that should give me warning of danger are sightless! Poor Helen knows little of the world which you enjoy."

Walter Nixon gazed into the upturned face of Helen Ryan, and as the lids, which had before drooped till the long lashes almost touched the cheek, were now raised, he saw that she was blind! An indescribable sensation of sympathy took possession of his soul, and his heart beat with a tender emotion. The admiration he had felt for the beautiful object was softened, and instead of being lessened by a knowledge of her misfortune, it was rather increased.

"Shall I not walk with you to your home?" he asked.

"As you please, sir. It is not far from here," returned the girl, who had in a great measure recovered her self-possession.

"Here, let me take your hand, and I will lead you. You do not distrust me?"

"No, no—O, no," she quickly returned. "I have learned to know people by their voices, and I am not afraid of harm from you."

"This is the path, is it not, here to the southward?"

"Yes. There is but one that leads to this place."

As she spoke, she put forth her small white hand, and Walter took it in his own. It did not tremble, but it rested there as though the soul that directed it knew that it was guarded by one who could not be dishonorable.

"Have you been always blind?" asked Walter, as he led the way through the woodland path.

"Almost from an infant," returned Helen.

"Then you remember but little of the visible scenes of earth?"

"One object alone is fixed upon my mind through the medium of sight," the fair girl said, while a tear gathered in her sightless eyes. "I can remember one sweet face that smiled upon me in infancy, and even now I can see the light blue eyes and kindly beaming features that then I beheld. Some may tell me that it is an image of my mind alone; but O, I know it cannot be. I would not have that face blotted from my memory for worlds."

"It was your mother?" said Walter, in a tone of reverential awe.

"Yes," returned the girl. She caught the tones of her deliverer's voice, and a look of effulgent gratitude overspread her features.

For some little distance the two walked on in silence. At length Walter asked:

"Have you not a brother?"

"Yes."

"Is his name Gideon?"

"Yes," returned Helen, with a wondering expression. "Do you know him?"

"I have seen him."

"Where? Where?"

Walter hesitated. He knew not how far it would do to expose the brother; but while he yet remained silent he was relieved by an exclamation from the maiden herself.

"Ah, now I know you. You are Captain Walter Nixon."

"You have a keen perception."

"My brother described you to me."

"And what description could he have given by means of which you can recognize me?"

"O," quickly replied the girl, with artless grace; "he told me you were a noble man, and that you were kind and good, and he said, too, that you were handsome."

Walter Nixon blushed a crimson blush, and his hand trembled, but in a moment he recovered himself, and he could not but experience a sensation of grateful pleasure at the unsought compliment.

"And how know you that I answer to the description your brother gave you?" asked the young man.

"Because I can see it just as he told it to me."

"You see it?"

"Yes, and I am seldom deceived. Those who trust things as they appear to the eye are often mistaken, but the language that speaks to my soul seldom tells me falsely. Such a voice as yours could not come from other than a good heart. A wicked man may speak in smooth words, but he cannot hide the affectation from a mental vision as keen as mine. The first exclamation I heard you utter told me that you were a true-hearted man, and had not the report of the gun frightened me, my heart would not have fluttered."

"But all that does not tell you that I am handsome," said Walter, with a smile.

"Yes it does, for the face which constantly receives its impressions from a noble heart, cannot be otherwise than beautiful."

"Ah, lady, I know many a noble-hearted, kind, generous man who is far from beautiful."

"You speak of what the eye alone calls beautiful—that which the world praises for its comeliness—but the true beauty of nature is that which appeals to our tenderer sympathies—that which the soul loves to dwell upon. I have heard people say, how beautiful are the mountains and the forests, and yet methinks, they are rough and ill-shaped, but it is their nobleness of nature that makes them beautiful."

"And yet," said Walter, "after all, that which is really beautiful to the eye cannot fail of

finding a responding sentiment in the soul. For a long time before I noticed the snake that had crawled to your feet, I stood and gazed upon the transcendent beauty of your face. It was the eye that detected your loveliness—it was the eye that assured me you were as pure as you were lovely, and then my soul responded. I know I was not mistaken."

Helen Ryan felt that the eyes of her companion were fixed upon her, and the rich blood mounted to her face. Her hand, for the first time, trembled in its resting-place.

"Forgive me," quickly added Walter, as he noticed the emotions he had called up. "I spoke only as I felt, and I am not used to hiding my honest sentiments."

The forgiveness he asked for, though not given in words, was yet spoken upon the glowing features of the fair girl, and Walter felt himself more strongly drawn towards the companion he had so strangely met. He could not fail to see that her mind was of no common stamp, and that her soul was as pure as earthly thought and action could be. Then her great misfortune, to a heart so generous as his, was a strong link in the chain that bound him.

"Take this path to the right," said Helen.

"It would seem that you are the most competent to lead, after all," remarked Walter, as he turned into the designated path.

"O, I know the way, but I have to walk more slowly when I am alone. You noticed that we crossed a little mound a few feet back of the path we have entered."

Ere long a small red house was brought in sight through the bushes, and Helen informed the young captain that it was her home. As he approached the door-stone he saw the boy gazing from the window, and in a moment more he came bounding out. He stopped suddenly as he noticed Nixon, but, a happy look illumined his features, and stepping quickly forward, he extended his hand.

"You took the brig, sir, didn't you?" he exclaimed, with a proud look and sparkling eye.



"Yes, I did, my noble lad, and I have to thank you for it, too."

"And you wouldn't be afraid to trust me another time, would you?"

"Not I, Gideon. As soon as I saw your face, I knew that I could trust you."

"And could you not have told by the very sound of his voice?" asked Helen, as she laid her hand upon her brother's shoulder.

"Yes, I think I could," returned Walter, as he gazed with fixed admiration upon the brother and sister.

"O, I knew you could. He is a noble boy—all that I have on earth now left to love me, or to—"

"Hush, Helen," interrupted her brother, at the same time kissing her upon the cheek. "You forget that we have a father."

"A father?" murmured the blind girl; as her lids drooped and her countenance fell. "Yes, yes, he is our father, but I cannot tell a lie to my soul, Gideon. You are all that is left me on earth. But stop! I forget. O, my brother, this noble man has saved my life. But for him you would have seen your sister no more on earth."

Thereupon Helen went on and told to Gideon what had transpired in the woods. Her words were fraught with a soul-sweet eloquence, and as she painted the scene as she had felt it, and mingled with it her gratitude, throwing out from her bosom transcendent sparks of almost heavenly emanation, Walter stood like one entranced, nor noticed he the flattery that had been poured upon him, until some moments after the fair girl had ceased speaking. Gideon Ryan thanked him with tears in his eyes, and the words that he meant should have expressed his gratitude, were almost choked away.

"My sister," said he at length, as he laid his hand once more upon her arm; "has not God smiled upon my humble efforts thus far in behalf of my country?"

"He has indeed," said Nixon, without waiting for Helen to reply. "I should not have come over upon this side of the river this

morning, had I not been in hopes of finding you."

"And if I had not called upon you to aid you in your expedition against the brig, my sister would not now have been living."

"It resolves itself into that," responded the young captain.

"And let us give God the praise," ejaculated Helen, clasping her hands fervently together.

It was a long time before the conversation was again resumed, for each of the trio seemed too much absorbed in self-thought and reflection.

It was now nearly noon, and of course Walter was urged to remain and take dinner, to which he readily consented.

"Is not your father at home?" asked Nixon, as soon as Helen had gone into the house.

"No. He has gone to Boston."

"He knows of the capture of the brig, I suppose?"

"Yes. He was down to the river the very next morning, and I fear he has gone to Boston to carry the news. Perhaps the British commander may send down a ship to take you when you attempt to go out."

"Never mind," said Walter, after a moment's thought. "It will be a smart ship that takes our brig away from us now. But how long will your father remain away?"

"He said he should not be back under a week, and he went day before yesterday."

A look of strange satisfaction dwelt upon the face of Walter Nixon, as he heard that the old tory was to be gone so long, and unconsciously he half murmured, it in words, but the boy did not understand him.

At this point, Helen appeared at the door and called for her brother, and the two repaired to the house, where the blind girl had prepared the plain dinner.

For a long hour after Walter moved back from the table, he sat and conversed with Helen Ryan, and the longer he sat the more lovely did the unfortunate girl appear in his eyes. The loss of her sight had turned the whole of her powers to the cultivation of her purer thoughts and feelings, and the gentle, dove-like

disposition, had been as the warm sunshine and genial showers towards nourishing the tender shoots of moral and intellectual life that had sprung up in her soul. Walter saw all this, and he could not but thoroughly appreciate and admire it. If Helen's eyes did not sparkle with animation, her ever active features made up for it, for they glowed with an intense fire when the soul was burning with a deep thought, and anon they would become as the undulating bosom of a lakelet that only reflects the tranquil, star-gemmed sky. But her eyes were not entirely dull, nor were they sunken in the least. They only lacked the fire of health, and the glow of satisfied pleasure. They could weep tears of sorrow, of sympathy, or of joy.

When at length the young man arose to depart, he was asked to call again, if he happened to be on that side of the river, and he promised that he would.

Walter Nixon happened to be on that side of

the river the very next day, and of course he called at Ryan's house. He did not fail to notice the quick flush of pleasure that settled upon Helen's countenance as she heard his voice, nor was he so foolish as to hide from himself that he felt a strange pleasure in her company.

No wonder that poor Helen Ryan should love to hear the young American captain talk. It was the first time for years that she had met with one to whom she could thus cling with the confidence of respect and gratitude. To be sure her brother was all in all to her, but he was young; and though to him she owed all the social happiness she had enjoyed, yet she drank not inspiration from his words as she did from the words of the new friend whom a kind Providence had thrown in her path. Her father—But of him the reader shall know anon. Suffice it for the present to say, that during the next four days, Walter made it in his way to call three times at the old tory's house.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE TORIES' LEAGUE—THE SUSPICION.

It was on a dark, cold night that a party of six men were assembled around a small table in the back room of the old tory's house. At the head of the table sat Silas Ryan, the leader of the traitors. He was a heavily built, gray-headed man, with high cheek bones, small gray eyes, and a countenance as sinister as one could find in the State Prison. Next to him sat a tall, red-headed, bony, muscular man, whom he called Mason. The next in order was the most gentlemanly appearing of the lot, but his smoothly combed black hair, and his oily looking countenance, stamped him as a ready tool for subtle villany. His name was Baxter. The next, a short, snub-nosed fellow, was named Goss. Then next came a Mr. Dow, a corpulent, red-faced man, whose nose betrayed its oft approximation to the brandy bottle. Last, but not least in subtle cunning, was a fellow named Wimper, who showed by his looks, that he was more than half Indian.

Such were the old tory and his league, and, take them all in all, they were about as unmitigated a set of scoundrels as one would be likely to find together on any one evening.

"Now, gentlemen," said old Silas Ryan, tapping the table with the bottom of a pewter tankard from the depths of which he had just drawn a heavy draught of punch, "let us to business. Everything is quiet about here, and we shall not be disturbed. First of all, what has transpired here since I have been gone?"

"Not much of consequence," replied Baxter.

"Yes, there has," said Dow, whose brandy-bloated cheeks fairly shook with the momentum of the intelligence he had to communicate.

"Eh?" grunted Baxter. "I didn't see it."

"No, but I did," triumphantly exclaimed Dow; and his bloodshot eyes looked as though they would have sparkled had they been bright enough.

"Well, out with it. What was it man?" said Ryan.

"I've been watching the young rebel captain, and he's making himself rather free about your premises," answered Dow.

"What!" exclaimed Ryan, half starting from his seat, and letting the tankard fall upon the table. "Are we suspected? Have we been betrayed?"

"I shouldn't wonder," uttered Dow, as such a thought for the first time crossed his dull mind and frightened him.

"It must be. But who, who, has done it?" and as he spoke, Ryan turned his snakish eyes sharply upon his league. "The man who has betrayed us had better have never seen the light of day, for he shall die."

"There aint much cause of alarm," said Wimper, the Indian half-breed, as he looked cunningly around upon the party. "I have watched the proceedings, and I know just where the moose lays. It's your gal, old Ryan, that's brought the young captain here."

"You don't mean Helen?"

"Yes, I do. The second time he came here I managed to hide myself so as to see and hear them, and they were as loving as two doves. It seems this Nixon saved the gal's life by killing a rattlesnake that was just going to bite her, so he came home with her, and he liked her so well that he came three times more. It's only an affair of the heart."

Silas Ryan gazed for a few moments thoughtfully upon the empty tankard that lay upon the table. There was a dark scowl upon his features, and his small gray eyes were snapping with a strange effect.

"Well, it may be so," he murmured, half to himself. "Helen's pretty enough to look at, and perhaps the young fool has been dunced enough to fall in love with her, that is, in his way. It can't be for good that he seeks a blind girl like her. But," and the old tory's face brightened as he continued, "this thing will work admirably after all. Helen shall be a decoy, and we'll trap the young rebel yet. If he comes again he don't go back alive."

The Indian's face bore a curious look of intelligence, but he said nothing.

"Now," added Ryan, "I suppose the brig is about ready to start off."

"Yes," returned Mason, "She was hauled out from the dock yesterday, and will sail sometime to-morrow."

"No, she wont," uttered Ryan.

"But she's all ready, and I had my intel-

ligence from one of the crew," persisted Mason.

"Ah, yes, and so are others ready. I didn't go to Boston for nothing. There'll be a first class sloop-of-war off the harbor to-night, and she'll shut the rebel in. The privateers wont make quite so much as they bargained for."

"That sloop-of-war aint no good," growled Mason. "I profess to know a little sunthin' 'bout vessels, and I tell ye there aint a craft in the British fleet that could stop her going out, if she only takes a dark night for it."

"And do you really think that she can get out if there's a sloop-of-war off the harbor?" asked Ryan, in a tone that showed considerable confidence in the opinions of his right-hand man.

"I know she can. I'd bet my head 'gainst that empty tankard that I could run her out to-night, myself."

"But Admiral Graves told me she wasn't much of a sailer, compared with some others he'd got."

"Perhaps she wasn't then, but I tell ye, the rebels have made wonderful alterations in her. She'll go out in spite of all that can be done."

"Then we've lost a good thousand pounds," groaned Ryan.

"Eh! A thousand pounds? How's that?" asked Mason, with a sudden start.

"Why, General Howe is to pay me that sum if the brig's taken before she get's to sea; but if she makes out to get outside, I shan't get anything."

"Hold on a second," said Mason. "I s'pose you got a little sunthin' for the intelligence we've already scraped together for him, didn't ye?"

"Yes, two hundred pounds."

"Then divide that, and we'll see about the brig afterwards."

Ryan drew forth an old wallet from the inner lining of his waistcoat, and taking out the money, he spread it before him. Then he took a piece of chalk from his pocket and commenced figuring on the table.

"Just thirty-three pounds, six shillings, and

eight pence apiece," he said, as with some difficulty he performed the sum.

"Now," said Mason, after he had pocketed his share of the British gold, "I'll make you a proposition 'bout the brig."

All eyes were turned towards him, and those who knew him best could see that he had really some important idea in his mind.

"If you'll give me one half of that thousand pounds, I'll put the brig into the hands of the sloop-of-war, if she's off the harbor."

"How'll you do it?" asked the rest.

"No matter. Just say that half of the thousand shall be mine, and I'll do it. I'll see that the sloop has the privateer under British colors in less than six hours after she clears the port."

"Isn't that setting it a little high?" queried Baxter, in a smooth tone.

"Suppose you say three hundred," said Ryan, after a moment's thought.

"No."

"Four hundred ought to be enough, certainly."

"It must be five hundred or nothing," persisted Mason.

"But that is unreasonable," said Baxter.

"And no mistake," chimed in Dow. "Gad, you wouldn't leave me enough to buy a pipe of brandy."

"Then you can do the business yourself."

"But, Mason, you know, according to our compact, we are to share equally in what we receive from the British," said Ryan.

"Yes, in what we receive for mere intelligence," grunted Mason, "but not in such a case as this. Will you go on board the privateer, and, single-handed, put her into the hands of the British?"

"No," emphatically returned Ryan.

Mason put the same question to each of the others, and received the same answer.

"Now," continued he, "you see just where you stand. You may have the five hundred pounds to divide amongst you, or you may go without it, just as you like."

This was bringing the case to a point where

all could see it. A consultation was held, and at length it was agreed upon that Mason should have his terms.

"And so you intend to go on board the brig?" said Ryan.

"Certainly."

"But suppose they won't let you?"

"I know they will. I am a good seaman, and I flatter myself that any crew who expect to have fighting to do would be glad of my services."

"Egad, that they would," uttered Dow, as he surveyed the gaunt, bony frame of the stout fellow; "but it's a ticklish job, though."

"Never mind that, I risk nobody's head but my own. Nobody but you mistrusts that I am working with the Tories, and I shall easily pass into the privateer's crew—then Captain Nixon may find himself done for."

"Well, that point's settled," said Silas Ryan, after he had looked at the matter in all its bearings, "and now we have got to be on our guard. While I was in Boston, I made out to get hold of one of the rebels, and I found out some startling things. General Washington has sent General Sullivan to Portsmouth to arrest all the Tory officers there, and he has sent to Governor Trumbull, of Connecticut, and Governor Cooke, of Rhode Island, to do the same in their places, and to take up all whom they may find that are opposed to the provincials, and I am sure that he has sent to Salem and Newburyport, too."

"Then we've got to be on our guard," said Dow. "Egad, them rebels'll make trouble, yet."

"They've made trouble enough already, I'm thinking," muttered Ryan. "But tell me," he continued, "have any of you found out how Nixon managed to board the brig?"

They all shook their heads but Wimper.

"What do you know of it, Wimper?"

"Nothing."

"Do you think anything?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"The Americans must have had our password and signal."

"Ha! Then we *have* been betrayed!" exclaimed Ryan, starting up from his seat. "Can it be that the traitor is one of our own number?"

"Did no one else know of the secret?" asked Wimper.

"No, unless my boy may have caught it."

"Then look to your boy."

"Look to him!" uttered Ryan, in blank astonishment. "It could not have been him."

"Nevertheless, you had better look to him," said the Indian, with a meaning look. "He is not always under your eyes."

"By the great Juniper, if I thought Gideon

had done this thing, I'd kill him with my own hand. But it cannot be so."

"Egad, Ryan, I don't know about that," uttered Dow. "I'll wager a pipe of brandy against a barrel of your ale that it was him, come. The little snipe's been over to the port more'n once when you didn't know it."

Ryan saw that his boy was not only suspected, but that conviction sat on every face, and he knew that he must take the matter up, or rest under imputation himself. The former thing he promised to do, and when the party separated at midnight, Silas Ryan had sworn his boy should die if he had betrayed the league.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE CONDEMNED PATRIOT—A NEW CHARACTER IN THE FIELD.

ON the next morning, Silas Ryan descended to his front room in an angry, sulky mood. He pushed Helen roughly out of his way, and as she fell upon the floor beneath the force of the push, he passed out into the yard. At a short distance from the door, engaged in chopping wood, was a man, somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty years of age, whose appearance would have at once attracted the attention of any passer. He was a stout-built, heavily framed man, with grizzly, bushy hair, and a countenance that would have puzzled the most expert physiognomist. There was a sort of simple look about the features, an almost foolish expression, and yet none would have thought to easily deceive him when once they had seen the quick flashing of his eyes. His name was Luke Soper. Gideon was assisting him.

"Luke," said Ryan, still standing near the door, "come here."

The man laid down his axe and approached his master.

"Go out into the woods and see if that deer trap is sprung."

"I've been out once this mornin'," returned Luke.

"Then go again. It may have sprung since you were there."

"It couldn't; there be'ant a deer in no more'n ten mile from here."

"Go and see, I say. Do you understand?" "Yes."

The clown looked hard at his master as he spoke.

"What are you looking at me for? Why don't you go?" exclaimed Ryan, angrily.

"I'm goin'," returned Luke, but when he turned away it was with a reluctant step.

He did not fail to notice that his master was in a bad state of mind, and he noticed, too, the look that was cast upon Gideon. Twice, after he had started, did he turn back his head and hesitate, but at length he disappeared in the wood.

"Gideon," said Ryan, "come with me."

The boy looked up, and a slight tremor shook his frame. His father's face was pale with excitement, and the sinister look that usually rested there had given place to an expression still darker and more powerful. He dared not disobey the summons, however, and with a trembling step he followed.

Silas Ryan led the way to a point in the woods opposite to that which Luke Soper had entered, and having gone some dozen rods he turned and faced his son.

"Boy," said he, "did you know that the captain of the rebel privateers was possessed of our secret signal and password, when he took the English brig?"

Gideon started and turned pale.

"Answer me"

"They must have had it, sir," at length stammered the boy.

"Ay, so they must. And who gave it to them? Do you know?"

The boy gazed into his father's face, but he made no answer.

"Answer me."

Gideon Ryan bent his eyes towards the ground and thought how he should answer. He would not tell a lie, and he did not dare to refuse to give a reply.

"I do know," he at length said. His face was pale as marble, but he was calmer than before.

"And who was it?"

"I gave the intelligence, myself."

"You did?"

"Yes."

The old tory stood like a statue and gazed upon his boy. His face was black as night with passion, and his eyes flashed with a fire so intense that the very lashes seemed to scorch beneath the rays.

"They paid you for doing it," he hoarsely whispered.

"No. I did it for my country, and if I am ever paid for the deed, it will be by seeing the land of my birth set free from the tyrant's rule. I do not sell my principles of action."

Silas Ryan started at this last remark, but it affected him only to enrage him the more.

"Boy," he said, "do you know what you have done?"

"Yes. I have helped my country take one step towards trampling upon her chains."

"Ay, and you have sealed your own death-warrant! You have proved a traitor!"

"To whom have I proved a traitor?"

"To your king."

"I owe him no allegiance."

"You have betrayed your father."

"It is my father who has betrayed himself."

"Enough, boy, you must die!"

"Die! What do you mean, father?"

"I mean that you must die. Your death-warrant is sealed."

"But you would not kill me? You would not, you could not, kill your son?"

"I have sworn by a most solemn oath that if you had been guilty of this crime, I would take your life. You know how insecure are the lives of the royal party, and more especially the lives of those of us who are acting as spies. Our compact is immutable, and you are doomed to death. You knew better."

"O, father, father! you will not kill your boy!" shrieked Gideon, sinking upon his knees, and clasping his hands together.

"Yes, I will. Did you not voluntarily place my own life in danger, and betray my cause?"

"But I made them promise that they would not harm you."

"Ah, then you *did* even betray me by name? Prepare, for you die!"

"No, no—O, God! I did not—I would not—"

"Silence! Say your prayers if you know any," said Ryan, and as he spoke, he drew a heavy pistol from his bosom and cocked it.

"O, but my poor sister—my poor blind Helen—who will be a companion for her?" passionately exclaimed the boy, as the big tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"Let her shift for herself. I believe she is a viper in my house as well as yourself. There is a pair of you."

In an instant the whole expression of the boy's face changed. The tears ceased flowing, the dark eyes flashed, the lips quivered, and he started to his feet.

"Fire," he said, as he folded his arms across his breast. "I am too weak to resist you, and I am too proud to beg further. I would not change places with you, and if you be truly my father, than may God not hold me accountable for your sins, nor visit upon me his wrath for your transgressions."

The old gray-headed tory uttered a bitter curse, and with a hand made tremulous only by the anger that raged in his bosom, he raised the pistol. The noble boy did not flinch, but he stood boldly there, and with his arms still folded he gazed steadily into his father's face.

"May God have mercy on me, and protect my poor sister," he murmured, and then he closed his eyes.

Ryan stretched forth his pistol, placed his finger upon the trigger, but he did not fire, for at that moment some one leaped like a panther from the bushes behind him, and struck him a blow upon the side of the head that felled him to the earth. Gideon heard the movement, and on opening his eyes he saw Luke Soper standing over the prostrate form of his father, and with a single bound he leaped into his deliverer's arms. He could not have calmly died now.

Ryan was not fairly stunned, and in a moment he sprang to his feet, but not, however, until Luke had secured the pistol.

"Was't you?" whispered the foiled villain, as he turned his eyes upon Luke, while his lips quivered.

"Yes, Silas Ryan, it was me," returned Luke, without so much as winking.

"Now you shall both die!"

"Not yet, Silas Ryan. I knowed you didn't mean no good to the boy, and I feared you meant a good deal of harm. Thank God, I saved his life, and yours, too; for had you killed him there would have been more blood upon my own hands."

"Beware, Luke! Give me that pistol."

"Not now."

"I tell you, the boy dies!"

"Then you die!"

"Luke Soper, you would not dare to lay your hand upon me."

"If you were to kill this boy, I'd murder you as sure as there is a God who knows both our hearts. Make your mind easy on that."

"By the great Juniper, Luke, I'll take your life for this. Give me that pistol, and let the boy-traitor go."

"You shall not have the pistol, nor shall you have the life of this boy. Silas, when you and I did that foul deed, I swore there shouldn't be no more blood."

Ryan gathered himself for a spring, and with a fierce oath he bounded forward; but he might have known that he sprang upon one with whom he was no match in physical strength. Luke met him with a couched fist, and again the old tory was felled to the earth.

"Silas Ryan, you'd better give up this mad freak, and you'd better not trouble me too much, for foolish as I am, I can be made as angry as you are now."

"Villain! dastard! idiot!" shrieked Ryan, getting once more upon his feet; "I'll have your heart's blood for this!"

"No you wont, Silas Ryan. You darn't take my life. I have made provision for that. There is another who knows all about your secret, and the moment harm comes to me, he will pounce upon you. I may be a simpleton, but you cannot over-reach me. You'll think better of this when you get sober. Of one thing you may feel certain; when these two children—"

"Silence! Luke—silence," uttered Ryan, turning pale with another sensation than anger.

"Well, I will keep silent now; but mind this: I'll protect the two children now, if it takes my own heart's blood. Come, Gideon, we'll go to the house."

As he spoke, he led the boy from the spot, but Silas Ryan moved not then to follow him. Gideon hardly knew what had transpired; but amid the vortex of confused ideas that whirled in his mind, there was one that stood steadily, brightly forward, and he caught at it, and lived in it. Perhaps, Silas Ryan was not his father!

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE YANKEE CHAMPION—THE TORY-TRAITOR'S FATE.

It was a cool morning, but yet it was gloriously beautiful. The white frost glistened in the sunbeams, and the air was fresh and bracing. Upon the breeze-ruffled bosom of the Merrimack lay a Yankee brig, a beautiful thing, seeming almost to have sprung into physical life. Few people could have recognized in that ocean siren the British war-brig, but such she really had been. Under the care and judgment of Walter Nixon, and by the aid of some of the best ship-builders in the colony, she had undergone a wonderful change. Her sides—in fact, her whole hull, had been painted black, with not even a stripe to relieve the sable hue; her bows had been sharpened, her counters entirely remodelled, giving a cleaner, smoother run; and her masts had grown surprisingly tall and tapering, and every precaution had been taken to have the rigging so arranged that the upper spars could be easily and quickly doused in cases of emergency. A single look at the caps and cross-trees, and at the length of the yards, would show that the brig could spread wider and deeper canvass than before, and then small bunts of canvass at the maintopmast cross-trees

and topgallant-mast head indicated that she lacked not for stay-sails.

There was one other Yankee improvement that promised to prove more formidable than all the rest. A stout platform, about a foot high, had been raised amidships, and on it, travelling upon an iron railing, was a long brass gun, carrying an eighteen pound shot. It was a gun that had already seen some service, having been taken from a heavy Spanish pirate that was wrecked some years before on the coast, and Walter had proved the quality of the plaything before he put it on board his brig. The chain and double-headed shot, and, in fact, all the shot, that the prize had on board, were just fitted to the brass gun, so nothing was wanting to make her armament complete.

Near the foremast, upon a coil of cable that had just been stowed in warping out, sat a tall, quaint, muscular, red-headed man, who had shipped on board that morning. The reader will recognize in this person the tory spy and miscreant, Mason. The young captain had liked the muscular appearance of the man, and though the sinister countenance was anything

but pleasing, yet he felt nowise loth to take him.

Nixon and Jake Maynard were standing together upon her quarter-deck. The latter, during the remodelling of the brig, had shown himself so thoroughly acquainted with all the affairs of shipboard that he had, by the desire of the captain, and with the consent of the other officers, been appointed to the important post of gunner, a promotion that pleased him not a little. They had been conversing upon the subject of getting under weigh, and were just taking a turn towards the taffarel, when one of the men, who was wiping the binnacle lights, dropped his rags and uttered a quick, startling exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Nixon, starting quickly aft.

"Look there, sir."

The captain looked in the direction pointed out, and saw, just standing into sight beyond the head of Plum Island, a British sloop-of-war. Mason got up from the coil of cable and came aft.

"That's bad," uttered Nixon, as he set his teeth together and clutched his fists. "They must have come down here to look after the brig."

"Of course," returned Maynard, at the same time looking half vacantly at the ship-of-war.

"Perhaps they've come to relieve the brig," suggested Baker.

"It makes no odds what they've come for," said Nixon. "One thing is certain; they'll make us out for a privateer, and they'll be likely to stop a spell out there."

"But we can get out," said Maynard.

"Of course," responded Walter. "That fellow will do us no harm; but then we shall have to wait till night."

Jake Maynard happened at that moment to cast his eyes towards Mason, and he was startled by the expression that rested upon that individual's face. It was a sort of diabolical grin, half of exultation and half of subtle villany. The old man did not stop to study the expression, for he was confident that his own counte-

nance showed the suspicion that had sprung to his thoughts, and he turned away his head and looked again towards the English ship.

"Capt'n Nixon," said he; "I b'lieve some bloody tory has been to Boston an' posted 'em up on this affair. I know there's a nest of the black scamps around here somewheres."

"So do I," quickly returned Nixon, while a flash of intelligence shot athwart his face.

Maynard cast a sidelong glance at Mason. He needed no more to confirm his suspicions, and he resolved that he would keep his own counsel and take the new man under his especial surveillance. He felt assured that Mason was a villain, and that he had come on board for no good purpose, yet he was at a loss to comprehend how a single man expected to do much harm among so large a crew of faithful men. But the old gunner saw that the villain's countenance belonged to one who would dare do almost anything to answer his own ends. As the conversation continued, Mason bent his eyes to the deck, and turning half around, he began to pick in pieces a rope-yarn he had taken from a pin-rack.

"What'll you do?" asked Cummings, as it seemed to be generally understood that the sloop-of-war had been sent down in consequence of intelligence the British had received with regard to the capture of the brig.

"I shall wait till night, and then run out," returned Nixon.

As the captain said this, he took one or two turns up and down the deck, and then he came back and looked at the ship, which was still in the offing, and standing slowly to the northward.

"Mr. Baker," said he, turning to his first officer, "get up the mast-ropes and burtons. Send the larboard watch aloft to clear away the rigging. I'm going to send down the yards and topgallant-masts, and haul the topmasts. Have the men work lively, sir."

"What's all that for?"

"To pull the wool over that Englishman's eyes. As soon as everything is down, I'm going to up anchors and haul into the dock."

again. He'll watch our movements, and think we are hauling up for some heavy job, and then he won't be so likely to keep a very bright lookout through the night."

All saw the drift of the thing, and the men went to work with a will, and in less than two hours the brig was half stripped and heeled over against one of the wharves, and there she lay during the rest of the day as innocent as a kitten. Her claws and teeth had grown out, but they hadn't scratched or bitten yet.

"Well, captain, have you determined what to call our vessel yet?" asked Baker, as he came up to where Nixon and some dozen of the men were standing.

"Yes," replied Nixon.

"And what is it?"

"We'll name her *THE YANKEE CHAMPION*!"

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

"*THE YANKEE CHAMPION*!" yelled Jake Maynard, as he swung his hat in the air. "May she wear the Yankee flag, and do a Yankee's duty, till there aint one enemy's foot on our sile, nor an enemy's ship on our coast! Hurrah!"

The whole crew joined in that wild hurrah, and they gave it three times three. No, there was one who opened not his lips. That was Mason. The old gunner had his eye on him, however, and the traitor was a marked man, though he knew it not. The villain might hide his plans, but he couldn't hide his face nor his feelings.

As soon as it was well dark, the masts were all fidded and the yards sent aloft, and then the brig was once more hauled out into the stream. The guns were all loaded with round shot, and the *long-tom* had a strong chain-shot put in on top of the round one. The boarding-pikes, outlasses, and small arms were placed in readiness, and the shot-boxes and match-tubs filled. Old Maynard carefully loaded a boarding pistol, and having picked the flint, he hid it inside of his jacket.

The night was comparatively dark, and at ten o'clock the anchor was hove up and sail

made. The wind was a little to the eastward of north, so that the brig could stand out with a good full, and ere long she was on her way through the channel.

Just before the brig reached the little island at the mouth of the river, one of the lookouts discovered a boat pulling in towards the northern shore from the sea. She was hailed, but no answer was returned. Nixon sprang for his night-glass, and levelling it, he could see that the boat contained four or five men, and that they were pulling with all their might.

"Fire into them," exclaimed Cummings.

"God knows it's some of that tory gang."

"So do I know it," said the captain.

"Then let 'em have it."

"And wake up the sloop-of-war, eh? No, no," Cummings, that won't do. Let them go. Their day 'll come yet."

Jake Maynard heard a low chuckle close behind him as the captain made this remark, and on turning, he beheld Mason. His hand involuntarily moved towards the place where the pistol was concealed, and his teeth grated together.

"I begin to see through it," muttered the old man to himself, as he turned towards the gangway. "This scamp has come aboard here to cut up some shine so as to cripple us, and that boat's been off to the Englishman to let him into the secret; but I'm blowed if they don't get their fingers in it."

The little island was cleared, and the Yankee Champion had begun to make the offing, when the Englishman was discovered standing off upon the larboard tack about half a mile distant. The brig had yet over a mile to make before she could clear Newbury Bar, and of course Nixon had no hopes of doing it without being detected. If, however, there was a doubt in his mind, it was removed, for he could see, with the aid of his powerful glass, that the ship was wearing, and he continued to watch her until she commenced standing down towards him.

Meanwhile, Maynard had kept his eyes upon Mason. As soon as the Englishman had been

discovered, the villain, stealthily edged along towards the brass gun, and in a few moments he began to finger around the apron. Two or three times he cast his eyes furtively about him, and then he drew a knife from his pocket, and having opened it he drew the edge across the lanyard that kept the apron in its place.

"Hallo," exclaimed Maynard, appearing to have just come up, "what you doin' with this gun?"

"Doing?" uttered Mason, suddenly starting and hiding his knife.

"Yes, what you doin'?"

"Why, I'm looking at the gun."

"Well, there aint the least need in the world of your lookin' at it, so go away from it."

"Are you the captain of the brig?"

"I'm capt'n of this gun, old red-head."

"Be careful, old man, how you insult me," said Mason, in a trembling voice.

"O, you needn't get mad."

"I shan't if you don't insult me."

"Nor I shan't insult ye if you don't meddle with this gun."

Now both Maynard and Mason had reason not to carry matters too far at present—the former, that he might not excite too much suspicion, and the latter, that he might not be suspected; but it was with much effort that they restrained their respective passions. The latter gazed at the old gunner a moment, and then he doggedly turned away.

The Yankee Champion gave an excellent proof of the power she had been endowed with, for in less than five minutes from the time the ship had worn, she had cleared the head of the island, and was ready to keep away with a flowing sheet. The moon, which had been hidden behind a mass of thick clouds, now burst forth, and the two vessels were in full sight of each other, and considerably less than half a mile apart, though now, that the brig had cleared the point, she was rapidly distancing her enemy.

"Well, now I wonder what that cuss meant to do," muttered Jake, as he held up the end of the cut lanyard. "Now he'll be up to some

other game. Such a cuss aint fit to live —, where is he?"

"There was a pretty big oath accompanied this self-asked question, but the old man's meditations were cut short by the whizzing of a shot over his head, and the booming of one of the sloop-of-war's guns.

"That came rather close," said he, as he sprang to the quarter-deck and looked after the Englishman.

"Full as near as is agreeable," returned Nixon.

"Hadn't we better give 'em a taste of long-tom?"

"No, no, Maynard. We should have to luff, as we stand now, to do that, and I'd rather get out of the reach of her—"

Before the young captain could finish his sentence, smash came a shot from the enemy, and carried away the starboard main-brace. By an oversight, or, by a pardonable neglect, the preventer braces had not been rove, and of course, the main-yard flew around and the brig fell off. The shot had also struck the starboard rail, but it did no further damage. A hauling-line was immediately sent down from the maintop, and bent on to the end of the cable that was still coiled away abaft the foremast, and then two of the men went out to the starboard yard-arm, hauled up the cable and secured it just inside of the brace-block, and without further difficulty the yard was brought back to its place by reeving the cable through a snatch block and setting taut on it.

"That shot must have glanced off in a most uncommon manner to have hit the main-brace," said Nixon, after the temporary brace had been belayed.

"May I be blessed if it musn't, though," uttered Baker, who now for the first time noticed the anomaly of the thing. "Ah, there's another one."

This last remark alluded to another shot that came harmlessly by. The Englishman was firing his bow-chasers about as fast as they could be loaded, but most of the shot hit wide of their mark.



The brace was hauled in, and it was found that it was the standing part that had been carried away, and that, too, close to the bumkin.

"Bring here a lantern, quick!" exclaimed Nixon, as he took the end of the brace in his hand.

"By heavens! that brace was never cut by a ball!" he uttered, as he held it to the light. "*It was a knife did that!*"

Jake Maynard started as though he had been shot. The men had most all of them gathered about the starboard quarter, and he ran his eye quickly over them, but the one he sought was not there.

"Is there a traitor on board this brig?" slowly, and meaningly asked Walter Nixon, still holding up the end of the brace, which had been smoothly cut with a knife till only about half a dozen yarns held it.

The men looked at each other and trembled, for they feared a secret traitor as they would have feared a hidden adder; but no one spoke.

"My men," continued Nixon, just as another shot came plunging up the water alongside, "we have an enemy astern, and if we cannot whip him, we can at least escape him. He is not an enemy to be feared, even were he alongside, for with brave Yankee hearts beating in our bosoms we know how and where to meet him; but if we have a traitor in our midst, a cowardly viper who springs upon us with the song of a dove, and stings us to the death with the poison of a serpent, we are no longer safe. Where is the man?"

A low murmur ran through the crowd of men, and they gazed anxiously each upon the other, but none of them spoke audibly. Old Maynard started forward, and looked about upon the fore-castle, but nowhere could he see Mason, and he was just upon the point of descending to the berth-deck by the way of the fore-hatch, when he heard a suppressed, choking cough over his head, and on looking aloft, he saw a man just climbing the futtock shrouds. By the pale light of the moon he could see that it was Mason. Quick as thought, the old man sprang into the fore rigging, and taking two rattlings

at a leap, he made his way aloft. The shrouds, having just been set up, were so taut that they shook but a trifle beneath Maynard's weight, and Mason could not have heard him. As the gunner rounded the edge of the top he saw the villain half-way up the top-gallant rigging.

"Who is that up there?" Maynard asked, of one of the two men who were stationed in the top.

"It's that new man," returned the top-keeper.

"Mason?"

"Yes."

"What's he after?"

"I don't know. He's stationed in the top, you know."

"Hallo, there!" cried Maynard. "Fore-topmast-cross-trees, there. What ye after up there?"

Mason stopped and looked down.

"What ye after, I say?" repeated Maynard.

"I'm going up to keep a lookout from the cross-trees," at length answered Mason, and as he spoke he started on.

"Stop! Come down out o' that."

"I'll see you hanged first. You are not going to order me around just as you please."

Mason had now reached the topmast head, and the old gunner thought he could see a sheath-knife in his hand. The villain's body was bent forward, but Maynard was convinced that he was reaching towards the topsail-tie! The scamp meant to cut it, and let the yard down by the run!

Jacob Maynard may have hesitated for a moment, and his heart may have beat more quickly than was its wont; but he set his teeth together with a grating force, and took one step higher in the rigging. Then he grasped the forward shroud with his left hand, and with his right he drew the pistol. There was a sharp, double click, as the hammer was drawn back, and the old man took a deliberate aim. At that instant the brig rode upon a smooth sea—on the next, a sharp report rung upon the air, and the men upon deck started in alarm. The tory villain uttered a quick cry, swayed for a

moment to and fro, then his hold was broken, and he fell sideways from the rigging, struck the topsail yard, and in a moment more there was a dull, heavy sound upon the fore-castle. The tory had lost his five hundred pounds!

Jacob Maynard quickly descended to the deck, and just as he stepped from the Jacob's ladder he met the captain and part of the crew.

"What's this, Maynard?" asked Nixon.

The old man sprang to where lay the body of the tory, and placing his foot upon the motionless breast, he replied:

"Here it is, sir—the traitor! I shot him just as he was goin' to cut the topsail-tie."

"Are you sure?"

"Just as sure as I am that I'm alive."

"Then thank God for his death," uttered the captain. "He looked like a villain; but how did you make him out?"

"I happened to catch his eye when the sloop-of-war fust hove in sight this mornin', an' I knowed by the way he looked that it wasn't no news to him. Then when we gave three times three for the *Yankee Champion*, he didn't open his lips. Then I caught him afool of the long gun, and I found he had cut the lanyard of the apron. He meant to have wet the powder, I s'pose. It was he that cut the main-brace, there aint no mistake about it. I followed him up the fore riggin' an' caught him just poking his knife around the tie. I told him to come down, an' he wouldn't, an' there he is, an' what's more, I should like the handlin' of his whole kidney, for I tell ye, there's a nest o' them bloody tories about the port somewheres."

The whole truth presented itself at once to Nixon's mind, and he had no difficulty in assuring himself of the nature of the source from whence sprang the traitor's aims and instructions.

"You've done well and nobly, my old friend," exclaimed Walter, as he turned and caught the gunner by the hand.

"I've done my duty, that's all," returned

the old man; "and I'm ready to do it again." "I believe you, and I believe, too, that every man here can honestly say the same. Is it not so, my men?"

A simultaneous, thundering "yes!" burst from every lip.

"Now bring the dog's carcass aft, and let's overhaul it," said the captain, and at the command half a dozen men sprang to obey.

As soon as the body was laid down by the binnacle two of the men began to overhaul the pockets.

"That's British gold!" said Nixon, as a well-filled purse was emptied on the deck. "It shall go to feed our soldiers at Cambridge. Ah, what's that?"

"A bundle of papers, sir," returned the man who had taken them from a private pocket on the inside of the tory's waistcoat.

The captain took the package and turned towards the binnacle light. He looked at one of the papers, then folded it and laid it aside. Then he opened another. As he commenced reading it, his eyes flashed, and his countenance was lighted up by a strange fire. After he had read the contents he ran his eyes over them again. Then he refolded the paper and turned towards his officers.

"Mr. Baker, Cummings, Maynard, come with me to the cabin. There's work ahead. My brave men, cheer up—you shall try your wits ere long. Keep the brig as she now stands."

Thus speaking the captain passed down to his cabin, and his officers followed him. The sloop-of-war had already been left so far astern that her shots no longer reached their mark, and she had almost dwindled from sight in the distant darkness when she ceased firing.

The *Yankee Champion* was upon her native element, free and untrammelled, and the brave hearts that beat within her were yearning for the first blow that should be struck beneath their Yankee flag!



## CHAPTER IX.

"SAIL-HO!"—THE CONVOY.

**A**FTER the privateer's officers had become seated around the cabin table the captain re-opened the paper that had so strangely attracted his attention, and again read it through. His companions watched him with anxious countenances, and wondered what he had found.

"Maynard," he said at length, as he spread the open paper before him; "your quick eye and ready arm is likely to have done more service than you may think for. That Mason was most deeply dyed in toryism of the rankest kind, and the British must have placed the most unbounded confidence in him."

"Well," returned Maynard, with a peculiarly twinkling eye, "I don't know how far they would trust him, but I don't think much of his judgment. Why, the tarnal fool might 'ave knowed that he'd git detected."

"O, perhaps not. In all probability he had not the least idea that he was suspected, and if he had succeeded in cutting the fore-topsail-tie, the sloop-of-war would have overhauled us before he could have been convicted, had you not have had your eye on him."

"Just as likely as not you are right, capt'n. I guess the sneakin' villain did really think he could come aboard here an' do pretty much as he was a mind to without getting caught."

"Seems to me if I had discovered the fellow as soon as you did, I should have told of it and had him nabbed at once," said Cummings.

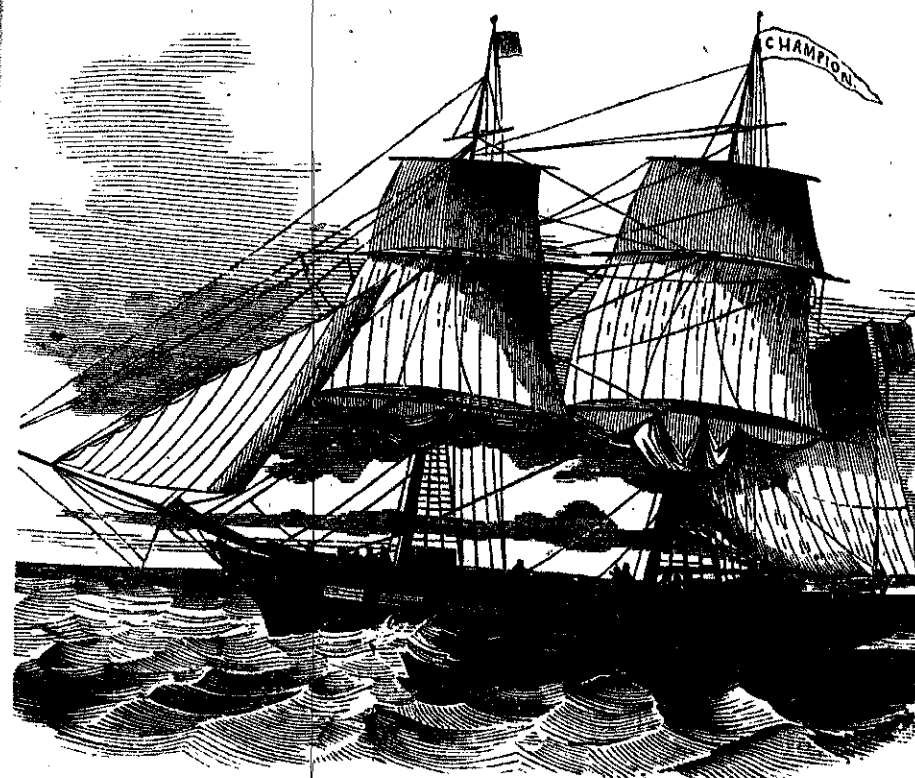
"O, no, that wouldn't have done, for he hadn't commenced operations then, and one is enough to know such a thing as that; for if there'd been a half a dozen watchin' him he'd have smelt the rat an' laid low. I knowed one could catch him the best. He wouldn't have cut the main-brace, only he did it while I was getting up the shot-plugs."

"Maynard was right," said Nixon.

"O, certainly," admitted Cummings.

Now Ben Cummings was not the man to carry forward a complicated plot, for he greatly lacked cool judgment; but he was a sailor, every inch of him, and he was fearless in present danger—just the man for his position.

"And now," continued Captain Nixon, "let's see how much we have gained by the detection of this tory. This paper was originally addressed to Silas Ryan, Esquire, and is signed by one of General Howe's secretaries, and I take this cypher in the corner, to be simply a mark made by the general himself to signify that it was written by his orders. It is meant for a sort of instruction and bond, both. I will read it:



THE YANKEE CHAMPION.—See page 40.

"Boston, Nov. 12, 1775.

"To Silas Ryan, Esquire, and the League of Safety for His Royal Majesty."

"Well, that's a fine sounding beginning. I must say," uttered Cummings.

"League of Safety! Well, one on 'em's safe enough, anyhow," added Maynard, "an' if we don't miss it we'll *safety* the rest on 'em afore we've done with 'em."

Nixon smiled at the old man's quaint earnestness, and then continued to read:

"Having learned that a band of piratical rebels have seized upon one of his majesty's vessels of war, and, moreover, that it is the purpose of said rebels to use said vessel against the royal interests; you and your league shall, if you can contrive to deliver said vessel into the hands of our faithful officers, receive therefor the sum of one thousand pounds, and this shall be a bond for the payment of said sum. We are particular that you should make all possible haste in this matter, for in the course of two weeks, we expect several store-ships from England, and though they will be under the protection of a heavy frigate, yet I would not have one of those Yankee pirates prowling about. In doing this, you will merit the thanks of your lawful king."

"What think you of that, gentlemen?" asked Walter, as he laid the paper on the table.

"It looks as though there might be business for us," answered Baker.

"*Yankee pirates!*" growled Jake Maynard, with an expressive look of indignation. "I shall just put a pin in there, an' lay it up. I wonder what in thunder the dad-rotted old king calls himself?"

"It makes but little odds what they call us," said Cummings. "I want to see the color of their eyes on the open sea, that's all."

"Well, I'm thinking we shall have a chance before long," said Nixon. "The store ships cannot have arrived yet, and we can easily intercept them."

"And the frigate—how'll you dispose of her?" asked Cummings.

"That depends upon circumstances," returned the captain. "We must see to that when

we get them in sight. We've got a craft under us that will handle easy, and I haven't the least doubt but that we shall be able to cut off one of the store vessels, at least."

"We can try, at all events," said Baker.

"An' if we try we shall be sure to do it," added Maynard.

"Now let us see how we are to stand."

As the captain said this, he arose from the table and got a chart of the New England coast, which he spread upon the table. After a short consultation, the necessary course was decided upon, and the party repaired to the deck. The captain called all the men aft and explained to them the intelligence he had gained, and informed them of what he intended to do.

A hearty cheer broke upon the air, and as the crew left the quarter-deck they were in a state of glad excitement.

The body of the tory was sewed up in an old hammock, a shot slung to the feet, and then it was committed to the sea. The brig's head was put upon an east-by-south course, the deck cleared up, and then the watch having been set, the rest of the crew went below.

In the morning the course was altered two points further south, and in that way the brig stood till noon, when she was again brought up to the eastward. The day passed away, and at night the privateer was got under easy sail, and a strict watch set.

On the next morning the brig had made over two hundred miles to the eastward, and Nixon felt confident that he was upon the track of the store ships. As soon as it was fairly daylight he had the topgallant-sails and royals snugly furled, and stationed a man on the foretopmast-crossrees with a good glass, giving him directions to keep the horizon to the eastward carefully swept.

Nothing, however, was seen during the day, and at night the brig was hove to.

When the daylight came again, sail was got on, the lighter sails, however, being still kept snugly furled so that they might not betray the position of the brig. The wind was north-west, and of course the Champion had it upon her larboard quarter.

It was a little past noon. The cooks had cleared away the mess dishes, and the deck been cleared up, and the men were lounging about upon the booms and gun-carriages. The captain and his first officer were pacing the quarter-deck in thoughtful silence, both of them apparently nervous and uneasy. But in an instant the whole face of the scene was changed.

"Sail-ho!" shouted the lookout, at the fore-topmast crosstrees.

"Where away?" asked the captain, springing quickly forward.

"About two points on the weather bow."

"Can you make her out?"

"Not yet, sir—but she's square rigged."

"Keep your glass on her, and watch well as she rises."

Nixon stood and watched the lookout as though he were a messenger from the celestial regions. His hands were clutched firmly at his sides, and his countenance was rigid with breathless excitement.

"She's a heavy ship, sir, with her royals on."

"How does she head?"

"She must be close-hauled on the starboard tack."

"Is she alone?"

"Hold on. No! There's another one! Wait a minute, —. There's *two* more, sir."

"Are they standing the same way?"

"Yes, sir."

The captain sprang aft and got his glass.

"Keep her as she is," he said to the man at the wheel, and then he clapped the glass under his arm and ran up the fore-rigging.

He ascended to the crosstrees, and found that the three sails were now visible to the naked eye. For ten minutes he sat there, and when he came down, his face was worked upon by the most intense satisfaction.

"Man the braces, fore and aft," he exclaimed, as he reached the quarter-deck. "Stand by to brace all up sharp. Down with the helm. We'll let her go about on the other tack, Mr. Baker."

The brig was soon upon the starboard tack, heading back towards Massachusetts Bay.

"Those are the chaps we've been looking

for," said Nixon, as soon as the brig was upon a tant bowline. "There's a frigate, and a ship and a brig. The brig is a heavy one, and I think I shall try my hand on her."

"Which sails farthest from the convoy?"

"The brig."

"Then I think we'd better make our minds up for her. The next thing is to get round the frigate."

"I've been thinking," said Nixon, "of making a bold stroke. You see we are standing now the way that the frigate is. Now I don't believe but that we might pass our brig for what she was two weeks ago. My plan is this: I mean to stand on this tack until I think we can wear and run down upon the frigate at just about sundown. We can easily keep her in sight until that time without being seen ourselves. Then I mean to hail the Englishman with the British flag at our peak, give him the name this brig bore before we took her, and run the risk of being detected. After that we can drop astern, and lay our plans for cutting out our victim. What do you think of it?"

"I think it will work," returned Baker, after he had given the subject a few moments' thought.

"The brig is a good deal altered, but if we don't get alongside of the frigate till about dusk I don't believe she'll notice it."

"Nor do I," said the captain. "Then it will soon be dark, you know, and we can operate without danger, for even should the frigate detect us in the act of taking her charge, she couldn't do us much harm, considering the darkness and the distance."

Nixon's plan was finally settled upon, and preparations were made for carrying it into execution. About half an hour before sundown the topgallant-sails and royals were set, the English flag hoisted, and then the Yankee Champion was put before the wind. In fifteen minutes the heads of the frigate's courses were brought in sight, and soon afterwards her double-banked hull was up. On flew the impudent Yankee, with a careless, saucy air, directly down upon the towering frigate, and no one could have dreamed that she meant any harm.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE STRATAGEM.

AS the Yankee came scoting down across the Englishman's bows, "Brig ahoy!" shouted some one from the deck of the frigate.

"Hallo!" returned Nixon, who had donned an epaulette.

"What brig is that?"

"His majesty's brig *Vampyre*."

The Champion shot quickly away from the lee of the heavy ship, and Nixon turned to his men.

"Braces, fore and aft, keep them trimmed nicely, now. Starboard the helm—not too quick. Keep her with a good full. Round in cheerily, boys."

The noble brig flew up to the wind like a bird.

"Ready about!" shouted Walter, as soon as his vessel was on the wind. "Helm's a lee! Clear the tacks and sheets. Let's do the thing handsomely, boys."

And the thing was done handsomely. From the time the brig first began to luff till everything was belayed on the other tack, she had hardly slackened her headway. She now stood on the same tack with the frigate, and in a few moments she was up under her lee quarter.

It was now fairly dusk, and the frigate's larboard hammock-nettings were lined with men. Nixon knew that the exact Yankeeism of his men and their clothes could not be detected from the enemy's deck, and he made himself perfectly easy.

"Frigate, ahoy!" he shouted, as soon as he got once more within easy hailing distance.

"Hallo!" came from the captain of the Englishman, whose epaulettes could be distinguished.

"Have you seen anything of a piratical looking schooner about here?"

"No. Haven't seen a sail for a fortnight till I saw you."

"Don't you bring a transport with you?"

"Yes, that ship has got five companies aboard."

"Then the brig must be loaded with stores?"

"Yes."

"Well, General Howe needs them badly enough, I assure you. The infernal Yankees are starving him out."

"Where are you bound?"

"We are on a cruise along the coast after a

couple of Yankee privateers. I think I shall fall into your wake till morning, and then keep away towards Long Island."

"Ay, ay."

"Hallo," continued Walter.

"Well, what is it?"

"The old admiral wished me, if I overhauled you, to place you on your guard against the Yankees, and bid you keep your eye on your charges as you approached the coast."

"Does Graves think I'm a fool?"

"No, no—but we have had some of our best store ships taken by these Yankees, and one can't be too careful. There are three or four of them prowling about, and they are not to be laughed at."

"I don't think one of them will venture near my frigate," returned the Englishman, in a proud, confident tone. "But what's old Graves been doing with the Vampyre? Hope he hasn't painted the whole fleet as black as you are?"

"O, no," replied Walter, with a laugh. "My brig was up for painting, and before we had time to get the white stripe on, I had to come out."

"Look out, or you'll get caught," said Baker. "If the Englishman ain't a fool, he'll know that's all gammon."

"What's all gammon?"

"Why, painting over the white streak with black, when you meant to paint it white again. That wont go down."

"It was rather careless, I must confess," returned Nixon; "but he wont notice it, or if he does, I'll smooth it over."

"You can drop astern, if you like," said the Englishman.

"I will. Success to you."

"Thank you."

With that the epauletted Englishman handed his speaking-trumpet to one of the quarter-masters and left the poop. Nixon spilt his maintopsail, and the frigate passed on ahead. Next came the transport, a fine-looking ship of some six hundred tons. The compliments of the evening were passed, and she, too, ranged ahead. At the distance of quarter of a mile from the

frigate, came the store brig. She was heavily loaded, and lumbered through the water with her bobstay dipping. She could not have been less than three hundred tons burden, and she was loaded down with as much as she would bear.

Just as the brig came abreast of the privateer, Walter had the main yard braced up, and as the topsail filled he began to sail again. He was not over half a cable's length from the Englishman, and though the sails of the latter took much of the wind from him, yet he found that his vessel would range ahead under full canvass, so he had the royals and topgallant-sails taken in.

It was now quite duskish, so much so that only the outlines of the men could be seen from the deck of one brig to the other, and the Yankee, having nothing to catch the wind above her topsails, got only a slight breath under the Englishman's lee, and was consequently dropping slowly astern. The two brigs were yet near enough to hold quite a sociable conversation, and the Englishman commenced it by asking about the same questions that had been propounded by the captain of the frigate, to all of which Walter cheerfully answered, and also giving a pretty clear account of how matters stood in Boston and vicinity.

Before the Yankee Champion had dropped out of earshot, Walter had learned all that he desired to know about the English brig. She was loaded with provisions mostly, though she had eight tons of powder on board in copper tanks. She had only twenty men on board, all told, and of those only seventeen stood watch, so that her watch at night could only consist of eight or nine men.

"Are you going into the bay?" asked the captain of the store brig, as the two vessels had become pretty well separated.

"No, I shall drop off to the southward in the morning."

"Then we shall have a safe protection through the night, with a frigate ahead, and a brig-of-war astern."

"Yes, very."

"Of course," chuckled Jake Maynard.

By the time the privateer had fairly fallen into the Englishman's wake, it was dark, and in order to keep astern, Walter found it necessary to hoist the fore staysail and clew up his heavy foresail. The wind had lulled some since the sun went down, but yet it blew a good five-knot breeze, though they were not now making more than three.

"Now, gentlemen," said Nixon, as soon as other matters were thus temporarily arranged, "we must begin to prepare for the capture. It will be easy enough to board the brig, if we are careful, but the greatest difficulty will be in getting her off without waking up the frigate. Her light will be missed."

"Not so but what we could run away with her in the dark," said Baker. "We can send a hand aloft to blow it out, and then the frigate's watch 'll naturally think the wind did it."

"That's the only way," returned Nixon. "We can put the prize before the wind, clap the studding sails on her, and soon run her out of danger. Let's see, the moon don't rise till after eleven, does it?"

"No, at ten minutes past."

"Then we've got plenty of time."

It was nearly half-past seven, and the frigate could only be distinguished through the gloom by the light she carried at her peak. Her hull, and even her tall spars, were invisible. The transport could only be seen indistinctly as a dark mass against the fleecy horizon.

"Get your cutlasses, all the starboard watch, and stand by to board that brig. Be sure and let no man take a pistol, for I would not have one fired for a thousand guineas. I want the captains of the fore-castle, and of the tops, a quarter-gunner and a boatswain's mate of that watch."

Five men stepped eagerly forward.

"You," said the captain, as he ran his eyes over the stout fellows, "I want should guard the companion-ways of the Englishman. The moment you board spring at once to your posts and secure them. Don't stop to strike a blow, for remember there'll be enough to do that. The heaviest work will be at the fore-castle.

The captains of the fore-castle and the fore-top and the boatswain's mate will attend to that, while the quarter-gunner and the captain of the main-top will attend to the cabin companion-way. Lay aft here, the starboard watch. Now," continued Walter, as the men gathered about him, "I am going to lay you alongside of that brig, without exciting her suspicion. Our bulwarks are the highest, and you can leap on board of her without trouble. Lay along under the weather rails, for I am going to run under her lee, and on the instant you hear the word, jump. Spot your man and secure him. There'll be three of you to one of the Englishmen, and if you are careful there needn't be noise enough to awaken a mouse. Remember, now, be firm, quick, and sure. Don't kill a man if you can help it."

At eight o'clock, Nixon could hear the officer of the store brig as he set the first watch. In half an hour afterwards he felt confident that the other watch had gone below, and he gave orders for boarding the fore-tack. As soon as the tack was hauled taut aft, the Champion fell off a little from the Englishman's wake, and then luffed again so as to run under her lee.

"Brig, ahoy!" he shouted, as soon as he came within hailing distance.

"Hallo-o-o-o!" returned the officer of the Englishman.

The Yankee had ranged ahead her own length before Walter answered.

"Haven't you got any papers from home?" he asked.

"Yes, a few," returned one whom Walter knew, by the sound of his voice, to be the captain.

"Why can't you throw me a bundle? I'll return them before I bear away in the morning. I haven't heard from Old England for over three months."

"If you'll come up near enough, I'll throw you some with pleasure."

"Ay, ay—I'll lay up under your quarter, and thank you, too."

"Careful, my men," uttered Walter, in a low tone. "Keep your ears and eyes open. Be sure of your footing when you leap."

"Look out, or you'll be afool of us," shouted the Englishman, who had just come up with a package of newspapers.

"Starboard your helm, quick!" exclaimed Nixon, turning to the man at the wheel. Then he added, in an under tone—"Keep your luff!"

"Good heavens, sir!" cried the alarmed captain, "that lubber of yours hasn't put up his helm! Look out!"

The words were hardly out of the Englishman's mouth, before there was a slight shock as the two brigs touched.

"Leap!" uttered Walter, and before the monosyllable had died away, he was upon the British deck, and Jake Maynard was by his side; and almost simultaneous with his own footfall were those of his picked boarders.

The trunk of the fore-castle companion-way closed with a slide, and it was instantly secured, but the attention at the cabin was not necessary, for there was no one in it.

"Why—captain—what means this?" uttered the Englishman, in half frantic tones.

"Don't you see, my dear sir? You are all prisoners."

And so they were; for not one of the watch had any kind of a weapon, and as the Americans were more than three to one, it was comparatively but a moment's work to secure them, and it was done, too, without any disturbance, for the Champion's men had acted their part to perfection.

"Eh! What? Prisoners? I don't—really—"

"O, it's simple as daylight," interrupted Walter, who could not avoid smiling at the captain's perplexity. "You are fairly trapped."

"But, sir, we are Englishmen, and this is an English store brig."

"And we, sir, are *Yankees*, and that craft alongside is a *Yankee privateer*! Now do you understand?"

For a full minute the dumbfounded Englishman gazed half vacantly into Walter's face. At first the thing seemed incredible, but gradually a sense of the reality came over his mind, and he turned his head towards the transport.

"Beware!" uttered Walter, comprehending in a moment the man's design. "If you open your mouth to give an alarm, you die on the instant, and so does any man who attempts it." And as he spoke, he gave emphasis to his words by raising a cocked pistol.

The poor captain's jaw fell at the sight of the cold iron, and for an instant he shuddered.

"Then I am really a prisoner?" he pronounced at length, in slow, measured tones, but with a deep spice of mental anguish; "and you are all *Yankee privateersmen*?"

"You speak of the matter just exactly as it stands," returned Walter, and then turning to Baker, who still stood near him, he said:

"Man the main braces, sir, and lay the main topsail aback as soon as the mainsail is clewed up."

"Be sure and move the yards very carefully, so that there shall be no noise. Now who'll go aloft and blow out that light at the fore-trunk?"

Half a dozen responded. Nixon selected the one who was the lightest, and bade him be careful and keep abaft of the lantern until the light was out.

"You don't expect you are going to get off with this brig, do you?" asked the Englishman, as a shade of hope passed over his countenance.

"Of course I do," returned Walter.

"You'll do more than I think you will, if you do," the captain said; but it was spoken in a forced tone.

"Now I think, my dear sir, that the hardest part of the job is done. I've run alongside of an English frigate, held quite a chat with her officers, passed the time of day with a transport full of British soldiers, and then boarded one of the frigate's charges, taken all hands prisoners, and made myself at home on her deck. What do you think of that?"

"I think you are a set of sneaking, darkness-loving scamps," returned the captain.

"O, lor sakes—don't," drawled old Maynard, who stood near. "You'll hurt our feelin's terrible."

The Englishman was not without common sense, and he saw that at anything like anger

or blackguardism he should get the worst of it, so he determined to keep quiet and trust to the possibility of either the transport or the frigate's seeing the game that was being played, and stopping the Yankee in his course.

The light at the mast-head had been extinguished, and the brig was hove to, and as yet the ruse had not been detected by the transport or the frigate. The prisoners were ironed, and a guard placed over them to prevent any noise, and then the men were let up from the fore-castle under the injunctive muzzles of half a dozen pistols which had been taken from the small arm-chest of the prize; for though Nixon would not have had one of them fired, yet he knew that their silent language would be impressive.

At fifteen minutes before nine o'clock, Mr. Baker had been placed in charge of the prize, with a crew of twenty men, and the rest went back to their own vessel, taking the prisoners with them. The lights of the frigate and transport were nearly lost in the distance, and still they seemed to remain ignorant of what had transpired.

As soon as all was ready, the prize was cast clear from her captor, both vessels tacked to the

north'rd and east'rd, keeping away with flowing sheets, and the store brig's larboard studding-sails were set below and aloft.

It was just eleven o'clock when a low, rumbling sound came booming over the waters, and soon another, in quick succession, like the mutterings of distant thunder.

"I guess the frigate's discovered her loss," said Maynard.

"Yes," returned Nixon, with a smile, "but I think 'twill be some time before she discovers the thing she has lost."

One or two more guns were heard, but the sound was hardly perceptible, and when at length the moon arose, Nixon swept his glass along the horizon, but the frigate was nowhere to be seen.

On the next morning, the wind came out fresh from the northeast, and the Yankee Champion and her prize were put upon a direct course for Newburyport. The store brig made good way under her studding-sails, though the privateer was obliged to keep short sail in order to keep her in company. Nothing was seen during the day that looked like a sail, and when, on the second night Walter Nixon left the deck he looked upon the prize as perfectly safe.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE HOMELESS.

**L**ET us leave the privateer and her prize to get through the night as best they can, while we look into the house of the old tory.

It was in the evening, and Silas Ryan was away from home. Within the small kitchen sat Helen and Gideon, the former engaged in knitting, and the latter reading a small English newspaper. To have seen Helen Ryan's fingers ply the busy needles, one would never have supposed that she was utterly blind! but industry and perseverance had rewarded her with the ability to do much of useful labor, and, when her brother was away, labor of some kind was all that made life bearable. There was a dull, smouldering fire upon the hearth, and on the small pine table burned a candle, by the light of which the boy was reading.

At length Gideon laid down his paper and gazed upon his sister, and as he gazed two big tears gathered in his eyes. Helen's quick ear caught the movement, and she stopped her knitting and raised her head.

"Have you done reading, brother?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then will you not put a little more wood on the fire? It is cold here, and I am chilly."

Gideon had not noticed the state of the fire, and he earnestly asked his sister to forgive him for his neglect. The bright blaze was soon dancing up the old chimney, however, and the room looked more cheerful.

"How dismal this cold wind sounds," murmured Helen with a shudder.

"It does, indeed," returned her brother, in a half abstracted manner.

"It seems dull and gloomy here," continued the blind girl, as she cast her head around as though she could see what she felt.

"It is gloomy," uttered Gideon, in a tone of earnestness that made his companion start.

"And do you, too, feel sad?"

"Ay, my sister."

"And what makes you so?"

"Much, much, Helen."

"Then tell it to me, and I will soothe your troubled spirit. I will be cheerful, my brother, cheerful as those birds that sing beneath my window in the summer days, if it will make you more happy."

"O, Helen, Helen, may God bless you," ejaculated Gideon, as he threw his arms around his sister's neck and kissed her.

Then he drew his chair to her side, and taking her hand in his own, he continued, in a low, meaning tone:

"The load that lays now upon my heart cannot be removed so long as this roof covers me. To see you happy, would give me joy, but even that boon is not left me."

"I will try and be happy, Gideon."

"And thus make yourself the more miserable and unhappy. No, no, Helen—there is no happiness for either of us beneath this roof. As well might a lamb rest in peace within the den of a wolf. This is a *traitor's* home, and its very atmosphere hangs about my soul with a leaden weight. This house is a foul blot upon the soil that gave us birth. It is like a bear's den in a husbandman's pasture."

Helen's hand trembled, but she made no reply to her brother's remarks.

"Helen," he continued, in a half-hushed whisper, "*do you love Silas Ryan?*"

The blind girl conveyed her left hand to her brow, and a painful struggle went on in her bosom.

"Do you remember that command of the Lord that you have read to me from the Bible?" she asked, at length.

"What is it?"

"Wherein we are commanded to love and honor our parents."

"Ay, I remember it; but do you suppose God meant that we should honor *wicked* parents?"

"Their wickedness makes them no less our parents."

"But tell me, Helen, do you, can you, love the man whom you call father? Can you find it in your heart to honor him?"

"Do not ask me such a question," urged Helen, in a plaintive tone. "I would not sin, even against such a parent. If he does wrong, that makes no excuse for us."

"But even God cannot love such a man," said Gideon.

"He does not love the sin, but yet he loves the sinner, for that sinner is his own child."

"Then suppose some being that was no child of God—some being of darkness born—should sin, and even turn his hand against the Supreme Being, how then? Could God love him?"

"If he had the love of mortals, of course he could not."

"Then," continued the boy, in a lower, and more impressive tone; "suppose Silas Ryan was not our father!"

The blind girl started and uttered a low cry.

"Suppose Silas Ryan was not our father!" repeated Gideon.

"What mean you, brother? Speak! There is something in your tones, in your manner, that gives a strange power to your words. Do you speak lightly, or have you a meaning?"

"I have a *meaning*, Helen."

"And what is it? O, it cannot be that my dream of years is true!"

"What was your dream?"

The boy passed his arm around his sister's neck as he spoke, and drew her head upon his bosom. "What was your dream, Helen?"

"Brother, I have dreamed that I could see, and my father has come to me and spoken kind words, and smiled upon me."

"Well."

"That man was not Silas Ryan!"

"You never told me of this before."

"No, because it was a mere phantasy of the brain—a dream-answer to my constant living wishes."

"Helen, that vision may have been a phantasy, but it was a true one. Silas Ryan is *not* our father!"

"Say that again! O, say it again!"

"I tell you truly. The hard-hearted traitor is not the man from whose veins we drew our blood of life."

"How know you this? O, make not that assurance upon a light foundation."

"I do not, my sister. Listen: For a long time I have been able to see that which was hidden from you. I have often wondered why Ryan kept old Luke, and fed and clothed him,



when there was little or nothing for him to do, but gradually, as I grew older, I learned to read men's thoughts by their looks, and I soon became convinced that Luke held a vast power over the man we have called *father*. I have heard words dropped between them that set my suspicions on the rack, and at length, three days ago, I had confirmation strong. Silas Ryan would have killed me with his own hand! It was on the morning that you told me he had thrown you upon the floor."

Helen trembled like an aspen, and clung closer to her brother; but she spoke not, for she was speechless with horror.

"Do not fear," urged Gideon, in a soothing tone, "for Luke has sworn to protect me, and I know that the unnatural man dares not cross him, though he is nominally his master." And thereupon the boy went on and told his sister all that transpired on the morning that Ryan sought his life.

After he had closed, there was a silence of several moments. Both of them trembled with nervous excitement, and they seemed to have thoughts so dark that neither dared speak them. Helen was the first to break the silence.

"I know now that my soul has not lied to me," she said. "It could never yearn towards that man as should the soul of a child towards a parent; but it has ever loathed him, though I have tried to keep the feeling back."

"He is to be loathed," uttered the boy; and then, while a convulsive shudder passed through his frame, he added:

"My sister, there's blood upon that man's hands!"

A stifled murmur, like the moaning of the wind through the cypress tree, burst from the blind girl's lips.

"It may be our father's blood!" whispered Gideon.

"God have mercy!" ejaculated Helen.

"He will have mercy on us. I know he will."

The clock that stood in the corner ticked loud-

ly and steadily, but its pulsations were no more apparent than were the beatings of those two hearts. On ticked the clock, and for ten minutes its hands travelled in a silence broken only by its own time-telling voice, and the moan of the night-wind.

"Helen," said the boy.

The blind girl started, as if from a dream.

"We cannot remain here."

"But whither shall we go?"

"Anywhere. We will live in some dark cave rather than to remain here. But we need not fear, for there are open and generous hearts enough to bid us welcome to a better place than this. I have two good hands, sister, and I can surely do enough to support us both. We are indeed homeless, now!"

"I can work, too, Gideon. We will go."

"I will first see Luke, and try to get from him some knowledge of the secret he possesses, for I would know more of this matter. We will go at once after that."

"We will wait a little while—perhaps a week," said Helen.

"No—why should we?"

"I may never see Walter Nixon again."

The fair girl spoke in a trembling tone, and her sightless eyes were turned towards the floor. The brother gazed earnestly upon her, and, young as he was, his tender soul comprehended the whole truth.

"Captain Nixon will always be known to the American people," he whispered; "and wherever we may be, we shall surely hear of him when he arrives in port. I will find means to convey to him a knowledge of the whereabouts of Helen Ryan."

The poor blind girl blushed as she thanked her brother, and she promised to follow him as soon as he thought best.

Whatever they may have wished to say beyond that was prevented for the present by the entrance of Silas Ryan, and at a rough command from him, the brother and sister tremblingly sought their respective chambers.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE FATAL CAST OF LOTS.

FOUR of the old tory's league entered the house with him, and as they took their seats around the fire, one might have seen by their faces that they were far from being pleased with what had transpired. Dow and Goss both of them pulled out their black pipes, and dipping them into the embers they commenced to smoke. Baxter's smooth face was as pharisaical in its expression as ever, and Wimper gazed around upon his companions with a deep, cunning look. Silas Ryan's eyes were fastened upon the fire, and he seemed almost afraid to trust them anywhere else.

"There's no mistake about it," said Dow, taking his pipe from his mouth, and speaking as though it was the continuation of a conversational subject that had been commenced before they entered the house; "Mason must have made a failure."

"A most decided failure for the present," responded Baxter.

"But he may yet accomplish his purpose," said Ryan, in a hopeful tone, without taking his eyes from the fire.

"I hope so," added Goss; "but I can't say that I see much hopes of it."

"Egad, it can't be that he's got nabbed, can it?" uttered Dow, seeming to draw the thought from a cloud of tobacco smoke that was curling above his head.

"Of course not," exclaimed Ryan, with sudden energy, at the same time casting his eyes about upon his companions. "Mason was too keen for that."

"But not too cool," said Wimper.

The rest all looked at the half-breed, and upon the mind of Silas Ryan, the meaning of that remark at once opened itself. He was moved by a deadly fear, for well he knew that all this disappointment had its origin in his own family.

"I think Mason would not expose himself," he at length said, in an uncertain, hesitating tone.

"Mason chose his own course," observed the Indian; "and I was willing he should follow it, but he was not the man for such a job. He's altogether too confident in his own rough strength and physical courage, and too hot-headed and ugly, by half. Now I hope you don't think those Yankees are a set of fools; if they had been, they wouldn't have taken that brig-of-war."

Why can't you lay your plans according to your strength, and with some regard to the strength of other parties? I serve the British because they pay me in gold, but their gold don't make me blind enough to think that they are ever going to subdue these colonies. While there's money to be made, I shall keep making it, and I'll be faithful, too, to those I serve. Now open your eyes. If I had a ton of gold, I'd wager it that Mason is dead."

"Dead?" repeated the others, at a breath.

"Yes."

"But what makes you think so?" asked Ryan, turning pale.

"Didn't the captain of the sloop-of-war tell you that he saw the blaze, and heard the report, of a pistol or musket, in the brig's fore rigging?"

"Yes."

"And what do you suppose that was for, if it wasn't for some traitor?"

"Egad! I b'lieve Wimper's right," uttered Dow, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe and put it in his pocket.

"I hope he aint dead," fell from Ryan's lips.

"I tell you, Silas Ryan, its past hoping for," said Wimper. "Mason put his head into a den of rattlesnakes, and he has waked some of them up before this time."

"Well, perhaps it is so," reluctantly admitted Ryan. "But the privateer may be taken yet. The English captain told me he should cruise along the coast till after the store-ships and their convoy had got in; and he may yet fall in with the brig."

"That's a faint hope, though it may be realized," said Baxter.

"But it wont bring Mason to life, nor remove from us the imputation of treachery," muttered the half-breed.

"Treachery!" repeated Ryan.

"Yes," returned Wimper. "Some of those prisoners will ere long find means to communicate with the commander-in-chief, and they'll tell him that their brig was taken from them through the means of a secret signal and countessign that was alone given to us."

Silas Ryan clutched his hands together in nervous agitation.

"Now what answer shall we make when we are interrogated?" continued Wimper.

"Egad, we shall tell them 'twas Ryan's boy," answered Dow.

"Yes," resumed Wimper; "and furthermore, that that boy knows all our secrets—that he has not only our own lives in his hands, but the lives of half the tories in this section. Silas Ryan, did not that boy confess to you that he betrayed us?"

"Yes," groaned Ryan.

"And did he not boldly avow himself a friend of our enemies?"

"He said he owed no allegiance to the king," equivocated Ryan.

"Then why is he alive?" asked Wimper, as he fixed his glistening eyes upon the tory chief.

Ryan hesitated and stammered; but at length he hit upon an expedient and plausible lie.

"I tried to kill him; but my father's heart failed me. Gentlemen, you do not know the sympathies of a father's heart."

"Stuff!" uttered Goss.

"Egad, I'm a father," said Dow; "but head me up in an empty brandy pipe, if I wouldn't blow the brains out of any child that should betray me or my friends."

"That's the only true doctrine," rejoined Wimper. "Gideon Ryan has the power to send us all to the gallows, and I know he has the will. Now he must die, and you know it, if you be his father. You got us to join you, and we solemnly pledged our lives for each other's safety. You must kill that boy before we leave the house to-night! Shall it not be so, gentlemen?"

"Yes, yes. He must die."

"Friend Ryan," said Baxter, in a smooth, oily tone, and with an encouraging smile upon his features; "you must kill him. Do not let your father's heart overcome your manhood. Remember that you are a royal subject, and forget that you are a parent."

"But he is still my son," groaned the arch hypocrite, vainly endeavoring to make his deadly fear appear to be paternal feeling.

"Forget that he is your son, and remember only that he has betrayed us all," continued the smooth-faced friend. "The blow can be easily struck—only the stroke that is necessary to kill a pig—that's all."

Silas Ryan shook from head to foot. He knew that he lied when he professed to feel a sympathy for the boy, for he had it in his black heart to do the foul deed; but he feared Luke Soper. That man, half-clown as he appeared to be, had a power over him that he dared not awaken to action. He was like all villains—bold as a tiger in moral darkness, but an utter coward in the face of virtue's avenger.

"Must I do this deed? Must I slay my own flesh and blood?"

"You must!"

A sudden gleam of sickly hope broke over the sinister face of Ryan.

"Are we not all equally interested in this affair?" he asked. "Are we not all equally betrayed and injured?"

"Of course," returned Baxter.

Ryan cast a furtive glance about the room, as if he expected to see the ghost of Luke Soper. Then he moved his chair nearer to his companions, and in a low, husky voice, he said:

"We have agreed that he who should betray us should die. My son has done that thing, and I give him up to his fate. But there has been nothing said as to who should be the executioner. Gideon has forfeited his life, for he has become a traitor, and in becoming a traitor he ceases to be my son. Now it devolves upon me to kill him no more than it does upon the rest of you."

"Well, and what do you propose to do?" asked Wimper.

"Why," returned Ryan, "as we have never settled upon who should remove our enemies, suppose we cast lots to see who shall do the present deed?"

The men gazed at each other for several moments in thoughtful silence. This was something new in their experience, and they were not exactly prepared for it.

"If it falls upon me, I'll do it without hesitation," continued Ryan.

"Well, I'm agreed," said Baxter. "I'm willing to give the father that chance."

"So am I," added Goss.

"And I," said Wimper.

"Egad, and so am I," uttered Dow.

Ryan hoped he should not be drawn, for then the deed would be done, and he could swear to Luke that he did it not, and he could swear, too, that he had no hand in it. Then the man he so much feared would have no cause for vengeance against him.

"I will cut five strips of paper," said Ryan, "and the one who draws the shortest shall do the deed."

"No," returned Wimper, "for you might mark them. I have a better plan. Give me five pieces of blank paper, and I will number them, *one, two, three, four and five*, and on one of them I will write the word '*knife*!' Then you shall each choose a number, commencing in order as you now sit, and he who chooses the one with that word on it, does the deed before we leave the house. Of course you will all choose first, and then if the number is left to me at last I will do it. Do you understand?"

They all understood it, and expressed themselves satisfied with the arrangement. A piece of paper was procured and cut into strips, and on each of them Wimper placed a number; then he took the candle, and going to the other end of the room, he wrote the fatal word upon one of them. After this had been done, he procured a book, placed the strips between the leaves, with the ends, upon which the numbers were, sticking out.

"Now we'll begin," said Wimper, as he once more took his seat.

The formal manner in which the matter had reached its present crisis had given it a deeper color, and the members of the league began to look upon it in a more serious light. They were anxious and uneasy. Baxter alone remained cool and unmoved. That smooth face of his was rubbed down and polished with the subtle grit of his own stony heart, and nothing could move it but malignant triumph, or deadly fear. He knew no power of conscience.

"Silas Ryan, it is your first turn!" said Wimper, as he held the book close in his hand. "Choose your number."

Ryan shook like a freezing child.

"Three!" fell from his lips in a hoarse whisper, and he gazed intensely upon the lips of the Indian to catch the first movement they should make.

"Blank!" pronounced Wimper, drawing the number and throwing it upon the table.

"Luke can't say I did it!" murmured Silas Ryan to himself, as he sank back in his chair and let forth a long breath that had been confined in his bosom.

"Goss, you come next."

"Well, I'll take five," said Goss, with a slight tremulousness in his tone.

A pin might have been heard to drop in any part of the room, as all eyes were turned anxiously upon the Indian.

The number was drawn and laid by the side of the other. It was a *blank*!

"Dow, your turn next," said Wimper, as he held up the book.

"Egad, gentlemen," uttered Dow, while a pallor actually manifested itself upon his red, bloated face, "I'll forfeit the next ten pounds I get, if you'll let me off."

"No, no. Go on."

He gazed hard at the ends of the three papers, and, villain as he was, he shuddered fearfully at the thought of being obliged to dip his hands in the blood of the boy. He could boast, for it was his nature, and he could deceive, for it was natural to his heart, but he trembled and turned pale at the sight of blood.

"I'll take one!" he gasped.

"Blank!" pronounced Wimper, drawing

the slip. "Now, Baxter, it lays between you and me. *Two* and *four* are left. Which do you take?"

"I shall take *four*," returned Baxter.

The lot was drawn and laid upon the table, but the Indian did not speak, for every eye at once caught the fatal word. Baxter had drawn the *KNIFE*!

"Well, it seems I am the man," he said, with as much unconcern as though he had been deputized to wring the neck of a fowl. "I am ready for this job. Ryan, show me the way."

As the smooth-faced villain spoke, he drew a knife from his bosom, and arose from his chair.

"You can't miss the place," said Ryan.

"The boy sleeps in the room right straight ahead from the top of the stairs. Don't turn to the right nor left."

"But you'd better go with me to make sure."

"No, no," said the host, "there's no need of it; and besides, it might wake up the young traitor. You couldn't miss it if you tried."

Baxter was not particular, and taking the candle in his hand, he turned to the door.

"Be careful of your light. Don't wake him," urged Ryan, in nervous accents. "I wouldn't have him cry out."

"I'll look to that," returned Baxter. "The thing shall be done quickly."

"You'd better take off your shoes," suggested Wimper.

The assassin removed his heavy shoes, and in a moment more he passed from the room. Those who were left behind could hear the slight creaking of the stairs as he ascended them, and as the sound died away, they hardly breathed a breath that could have moved a feather.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE KNIFE-BLOW—THE STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WITH a stealthy, cat-like tread, Baxter approached the room where slept the boy. He stopped at the door, and bending his ear close to the hole where the tongue of the latch went through he listened. He could hear the low, steady breathing of his victim, and he felt assured that he was asleep.

Cautiously the tory raised the latch and pushed open the door. He shaded the light with his hand, and crept in, and after standing for a moment near the bed, he gradually let the blaze of the candle shine upon the face of the sleeper. Gideon Ryan slept on, all unconscious of the presence of the night-fiend that stood within his chamber. There was a soft, melancholy look upon his features, and his countenance seemed to vary its tones and expressions. His lips moved, and the word "*sister*," was whispered, and then a smile broke over his pale face.

Baxter started and shaded his light. He moved not, but for a moment he listened.

"He only dreams," he murmured to himself at length, and once more he withdrew his hand from the light and set the candle upon a chair, near the head of the bed.

Noiselessly the villain glided to the side of the couch, and taking the edge of the quilt in his hand, he carefully drew it down so as to expose the boy's breast; then he placed his hand in his own bosom and drew forth his knife.

"You'll betray no more men!" half audibly muttered Baxter, as he seemed calculating the exact position of the boy's heart. "You've done too much now."

Baxter did not hear the slight rustling at the foot of the bed, nor did he see the form that crept from beneath it, for his back was turned that way. He put forth his left hand, as if to stop his victim's mouth, and then he raised his knife.

In another moment the blow would have been struck, but there was one present who had exactly calculated upon that moment for himself.

Luke Soper sprang like a cat upon the black-hearted villain, placed his big hand upon his mouth, and drew the head back. At the same instant Luke's right hand fell with a heavy blow, and the knife he held was buried to the hilt in the tory-assassin's heart. The faithful protector of the boy still held his hand upon

Baxter's mouth, and though the dying man struggled convulsively, yet he was held so firmly that he made no noise.

At length the limbs ceased their movements, the lips settled into quiet, and the last throes of departing life had gone forth. For a moment, Luke gazed into the hard features of the tory, and being assured that he was dead, he carefully laid the corpse back upon the floor.

The first movement of Luke, as he sprang upon the intended murderer, which was only a low, shuffling sound, had slightly disturbed the boy, and just as his preserver arose from the corpse, he started up in his bed.

"—sh! Keep perfectly still, Gideon; don't make any noise. Up, quick! and dress yourself."

"Is that you, Luke?"

"Yes, yes—get up and dress."

"What's the matter?" And the poor boy rubbed his eyes, as if to assure himself that he was awake.

"Your life aint safe a moment longer in this house. Don't make a breath of noise. Get up and look here."

"Good heaven! Luke, what is this?"

"—sh! Don't you see? It's Baxter. Look in his hand. That knife was for you. They sent him up from below to kill you, for they've sworn that you shall die to-night. You aint safe here a moment. Quick! dress yourself and come with me."

"But what—"

"Don't stop to ask a question, but come. I'll tell you all when I have time. They'll be up here before long, when they see that Baxter don't come back. On with your clothes."

The boy seemed to comprehend it all, for he slid noiselessly from his bed, and in a minute he was ready.

"Come, we will go out by the window."

Gideon took a step forward, and then he hesitated.

"But my sister. O, Luke, I cannot leave her. Let her go with us."

"No, no—I'll bring her to you. We haven't a moment to lose now. They won't

hurt poor Helen. Come, come, I swear to you that I'll bring your sister to you as soon as you are safe yourself."

Gideon hesitated no longer, but casting one look upon the cold corpse of the tory, and breathing a silent prayer for his blind sister, he stepped to the window.

"Tisn't very high, this window aint," whispered Luke, as he lifted the boy in his light arms after the sash had been thrown up. "I'll lower you down by the hands, and then you can drop to the ground without hurting you."

It was but a moment's work to place Gideon upon the frosty ground, and it took but a moment more for Luke to gain a place by his side.

"Here, Gideon, take this pistol. It's got two balls in it. You may want it. Come."

As Luke spoke, he took his young charge by the hand, and hastened off towards the woods in a south-westerly direction, and in a few moments they were buried in the darkness of the forest.

Let us return now to the tories. For a long time after Baxter left them they sat in a profound silence, with their ears turned anxiously towards the door. All seemed still as the grave. Even the very wind appeared to have hushed its moanings, and the fire upon the hearth had ceased blazing, and now lay smouldering beneath its grave of ashes.

"Hark!" whispered Wimper, who sat nearest to the door, and whose quick ear caught a light shuffling sound above.

"Has he struck?" asked Ryan, whose face, by the sickly glare of the few embers that reached above the ashes, looked a livid, ghastly hue.

"—sh!—Ha! That's a knife-stroke!"

The tories started, as if from a trance. The Indian stole from his chair, and placed his ear at the crack of the door.

"There'll be no noise," he uttered, after he had remained a moment in his new position.

"I can hear the death-rattle. The blow's been struck with a sure hand!"

For an instant, Silas Ryan felt relieved, but when the thought that the boy was dead came

over his mind with full force, his heart sank in his bosom, and he was seized with a strange, a deadly fear. The atmosphere around him seemed filled with ghosts of men who came to exult over his abject bondage, and he placed his hands over his brow to shut out the phantasy.

Five minutes passed away like so many hours, but the assassin returned not. The tories watched the door most anxiously.

"It's strange he does not come," said Wimper.

"What can he be about?" wondered Dow.

"Are you sure you heard him strike?"

"Yes," returned the Indian. "You don't suppose he'd have been all this time doing nothing, do you?"

"Of course not; but egad, he's a long time about what he has done."

The old clock in the corner ticked away three minutes more.

"Ryan," said Wimper, "you'd better go up and see what's the matter. Baxter can't have been all this time doing the job. Heavens! what is the matter?"

No wonder the Indian asked the question, for Ryan had started from his chair, and he looked the very picture of frightful horror. His hair stood half erect, the eye-balls were glaring wildly and starting out from their sockets, and the mouth was opened with a gasping expression.

"For heaven's sake, what ails you, Ryan?"

The tory started and stared vacantly at his interlocutor. With a powerful effort he brought his gift of speech to aid him.

"My boy is dead!" he uttered, with consummate skill at effect.

His companions sympathized with him, for they really believed that he spoke the truth. They did not know Silas Ryan, as they thought they did.

"Well," said Wimper, "you can go up and see what has become of Baxter."

"You go with me, Wimper."

A scornful smile broke over the Indian's face, but he at once consented to go.

The two men ascended the stairs, and cau-

tiously they entered the chamber. The light was still burning upon the chair, and it threw its flickering beams full upon the prostrate form of Baxter. The tories started back in horror and astonishment.

"Good heavens! Ryan, what is this?" exclaimed Wimper, as he at length sprang forward and knelt by the side of the fallen man. "It's Baxter! He's dead as a log, with a knife-blow in his heart!"

"The boy did it," gasped Ryan, without daring to go near the corpse.

"The boy never did it! His arm never struck that blow. 'Twas a man did that, and a strong one, too!"

The first exclamation from Wimper had brought the other two men up from the room below.

"Egad, who's that?" uttered Dow.

"It's Baxter, as I'm a living man," cried Goss, who had pressed forward.

"Silas Ryan, who did this?" sternly asked Wimper. "It must have been a powerful man, for this body was held with a strength greater than yours or mine—a strength almost super-human."

"How d'ye know?" asked Dow, through whose thick head a comprehensive idea was never guilty of working its way without aid.

"Why, if he hadn't have been held with an arm of iron, I should at least have heard a struggle," returned the Indian, whose quick wit was not to be deceived. "Ryan, who did it?"

Silas Ryan gathered all his energies for one powerful effort. He knew that he could not deceive his companions into the belief that Gideon had done the deed, and he resolved to tell part of the truth. He at length succeeded in forcing back from his countenance most of the terror-marks that had dwelt there, and stepping nearer to where the corpse lay, he said:

"I think I know the truth, gentlemen. That half-foolish fellow who has lived with me, must have been in the chamber."

"He does not sleep here with the boy, does he?"

"No, his bed is in the garret."

"Then how came he here?" asked the Indian, with keenly burning eyes, as he arose to his feet.

Ryan hesitated, but an expedient soon came to his aid.

"It must be that Gideon told him something about my threatening to kill him the other day. The clown has always been fond of the boy, and no doubt he has had his eyes on him ever since to protect him."

"Silas Ryan, did you not know of this? Had you no idea that that man was here?"

"As God is my judge I had not. I call on heaven to strike me dead this moment, if I did not believe sincerely that Baxter would find the boy alone."

Ryan spoke the truth for once, and Wimper believed him, though he showed by his countenance that his confidence in the old man was not unbounded.

"Egad, that's a pretty mess," uttered Dow, who had a remarkable faculty of seeing things that had opened themselves to his vision. "There's two of our best men gone to never-come-back-again."

"Yes," quickly returned Wimper, "and we must nab that Soper and the boy, or we shall all be likely to go in the same way. Let's go below, Ryan; get us a lantern as quickly as possible. We'll leave the body here till we come back. They must be taken to-night."

The party at once repaired to the kitchen, and in a few moments a lantern was procured. A lighted candle was placed in it, and Wimper took it in his hand. He was not the ostensible leader of the league, but he was by far the quickest witted of the lot, and as none objected, he took upon himself the responsibility of conducting affairs for the present.

"Are your pistols all loaded and carefully primed?" he asked, as soon as they were ready to go.

"Yes," they answered.

"Then let's see if we can make out any tracks of the runaways."

The party passed out of doors, and Wimper led the way to the end of the house. Directly beneath the window of Gideon's chamber he held his lantern down to the ground and began to examine the marks.

"I'm right," he uttered. "Here are the deep prints of the feet of a man and a boy where they landed from the window."

"Now which way 'd they go, I wonder?" said Dow, who felt it necessary to say something.

"We'll soon find that," returned Wimper, at the same time moving slowly along away from the building with the lantern towards the ground. "Here are their tracks as plain as daylight on the frost. Come along this way."

Luke and Gideon had indeed left pretty plain foot-prints behind them in the frost, and the quick eye of the Indian readily detected them. At length the party reached the point where the fugitives had entered the wood, and here, of course, the tracks were lost.

"Now," said Wimper, "we must separate. Let us look sharp and keep our ears open. They have evidently calculated to strike the river, and Ryan and myself will spread that way. You two open to the northward further. The boy cannot make his way so fast through the thick wood as we can, and if we are sharp we may catch them. They can't have over fifteen minutes the start. If you see them, fire, and at the first report the others will fly to the spot."

"Egad, I'll fire," valiantly uttered Dow, as he pulled his coat collar up about his ears.

"But mind that you shoot the man first," added Wimper; "for the boy can be easily taken after that."

"We'll shoot 'em both."

"Now for it, men. Quick is the word. If they escape us, we are lost."

Thus speaking, Wimper dove into the woods, and the others followed his example. They had hit the true course, and hardly could they fail of coming upon the pair they sought.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SLOOP-OF-WAR.

THE second morning that dawned after the capture of the store-brig, found Walter Nixon in his berth. He had been on deck most of the night, having been called up by the appearance of a sail which was coming down from the northward, and which proved to be nothing but a Plymouth fisherman that had ventured out. The brig was bound directly for Newburyport, and heading west-nor'-west, with the wind north-east, and not over seventy-five miles from the coast.

Nixon was suddenly aroused from an uneasy, wakeful slumber, by the hum of hurried voices on the deck, and in a moment more, Cummings came into the cabin.

"What's the matter?" asked the captain, leaping from his berth and smoothing down his vest. He had not undressed.

"There's a sail in sight to the southward." "Perhaps it's the one that run down last night."

"No, sir. She's standing this way."

"Have you made her out?"

"Yes. She was hull up when the day broke. She's a sloop-of-war, and British, of course."

"Zounds! that's bad!" uttered Nixon.

"How does she take the wind?"

"She's a little free on the starboard tack."

"And running for us?"

"Yes. She's coming up rapidly."

By this time, Nixon was ready to go on deck, and buckling his faithful old sword about him, and taking his glass, he sprang up the ladder.

Right abeam, not more than a mile and a half distant, and heading across the privateer's fore-foot, loomed up the same ship that had blockaded the port of Newbury when the brig ran out. Nixon knew her the moment he brought his glass to bear on her.

"That's a bad fix, isn't it?" said Cummings, as he stood gazing upon the sloop-of-war.

"Rather bad, I must confess," returned Nixon.

"You'll have your turn now, if I am not much mistaken."

The officers turned suddenly upon the last speaker, and found it to be the captain of the store-brig. He had the privilege of the deck, and having heard the movements of the crew he had come up from his berth.

"What d'ye s'pose is goin' to give us our turn?" asked Jake Maynard.

"That sloop-of-war," returned the Englishman, while his eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"An' what in thunder d'ye s'pose we care 'bout her!"

"You'll see when she comes up."

"S'pose'n she shouldn't come up, old feller?"

"She looks like it, now, at all events."

"So did you look like going into Boston harbor afore we took ye."

The Englishman winced.

"We didn't know you," he said, "for you wore false colors; but that ship does know you, and you'll find it out, too."

"We sailed under false colors, did we?" uttered Jake, with a provoking look.

"Yes, you did."

"No, sir. Aint this brig ours?"

"It is as long as you keep it."

"An' that'll be till after your old hulks are driven out of Yankee water. Just put that up in your head for a piece of valuable information. An' now I'd just like to ask you if everything we took in this brig aint ours?"

"I suppose it is."

"An' so do I. We took them colors, sir, an' we'll wear 'em just when we are a mind to—though I must say that it makes us feel kind o' mean to stand under 'em."

"You talk well on board of your own vessel; but wait till the ship comes up! She'll know you."

"So she will, but tie me up in reef-knots if I don't believe she'll wish she never had!"

"You'll get some of your conceit taken out of you, before his majesty's done with you."

"Don't talk about your dod-rotted old majesty to us. We Yankees take folks for just what they are, an' not for what they are called, nor for what they think they are themselves. 'Cause old George wears a peaked thing on his head all set round with gold and jewels, that don't make him any better than anybody else; nor it don't make him know any more, neither, 'cause if it did he wouldn't be such a tarred old

blockhead as to think he can whip the Yankee colonies into his traces again. I don't know as your king's any worse 'n anybody else, but I know he tried to tread on us, and what's more, I know 'at we wont bear it."

"Sometimes folks have to bear a thing, whether they like it or not," said the Englishman; and with that he turned away from the incorrigible old gunner and approached Nixon.

"Captain," he said, with a respectful bow, "I suppose you will not detain us prisoners on board your vessel?"

"And why not?" asked Nixon.

"Why, we are not among those who fight against you. We are only merchants, after all. You wont gain anything by keeping us."

"Really, my dear sir, I don't understand you," said Nixon, with a puzzled look.

"Why, what will be the use in keeping us after you have given up your prize? When you call your prize-crew back to their own vessel, why not let us go back to ours?"

"Give up our prize! Call the prize-crew back! What do you mean?"

"You must be aware that the store-brig cannot get away from that sloop-of-war, though this vessel will easily outsail her. I suppose, sir, if you want to save your own necks, that you will leave the prize to shift for herself, and make all the sail you can."

"Oho-o!" uttered Walter, with a most peculiar emphasis; "now I understand you. You think I'm going to run away from that fellow?"

"Certainly."

"Ha, ha, ha—why, I haven't thought of such a thing."

"Do you mean to fight her?"

"You shall see."

The poor Englishman was dumbfounded. The idea that the privateer would face a British sloop-of-war was something that had never entered his head, and with a countenance upon which were strangely blended astonishment and anxiety, watched for the result.

The sloop-of-war was now about a mile distant, and directly upon the Champion's lee

beam, while the prize was under her lee quarter. Nixon hove his main-topsail aback, and then hailing the store-brig, he ordered Baker, who, it will be remembered, had charge, to luff and run under the Champion's stern, and stand on to the windward.

The prize was soon in the desired station, and Nixon filled away again.

"Captain Nixon, do you intend to fight that sloop-of-war?" asked the Englishman, who seemed to have some little dislike to being shot by his own countrymen; for he saw by the movements about him that some such thing was anticipated.

"I mean to give her a smell of Yankee powder, sir, and a taste of Yankee iron."

"You must be a reckless man, sir."

"Look at that, sir."

Nixon smiled as he spoke, and at the same time significantly pointed towards the long brass gun, which old Maynard had put in glittering order. The Englishman seemed to understand but about half of what the young American meant; but even that half gave him food for reflection.

"Mr. Maynard," said Nixon, turning to his gunner; "do you suppose you can make a sure shot with that gun?"

"I can try it, sir. I've fired her a good many times afore she was put aboard this craft. When she stood on the hill I used to take the ticket, sir. I've hit the bull's-eye at a hundred rods."

"Then get your plaything in working order as soon as possible, and we'll salute that ship."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried Maynard, as he gladly sprang to obey the order.

"Maynard."

"Hallo, sir?"

"Give her only a round shot to commence with."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The old gunner called the crew of the long-tom about him, and in a few moments she was in good playing order.

"Think you can touch the Englishman at that distance?" asked Nixon, as he came up to the gun.

The old man ran his eye along the surface of the water till he struck the ship, and after calculating for a moment, he replied:

"The wind is just exactly in our favor. Couldn't do much at that distance agin the wind, but guess I can now."

"Then try it. We lay just right for a shot."

The English captain began to see now the game of the Yankees. He knew that the sloop-of-war only carried twenty-four-pound carronades, and that she could not throw a ball two thirds the distance that could be made by the privateer's long gun.

"You may fire as soon as you like."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The gun was primed and levelled, and then taking the lighted match in his hand, Maynard watched for his chance. The line of his aim struck the ship's fore-yard in the slings and passed off over the larboard quarter. The moment he got that range he fired. The smoke lifted in season to see the shot strike the water just under the Englishman's starboard fore-chains.

"That was a good shot, Maynard," said the captain.

"It ought to have been better, sir," returned the old gunner, with a spice of disappointment in his tone.

"O, it was good enough. I'll warrant you the sloop-of-war wouldn't thank you for a better one. Load her again."

Maynard was very careful in charging the piece, and again he was ready to fire.

"Wont you put up the helm very slowly?" he said to the captain.

The order was given, and as the brig began gradually to fall off, the old man watched the range with a keen eye.

"Steady, so!" he cried; and in a moment more he applied the match.

The first word that was spoken, was by the English captain, who had a place to the windward of the gun, and that word was one of mingled pain and astonishment. Nixon levelled his glass, and found that the shot had carried away the bumkin to which the fore-tack had



been hauled down, and that the ship's foresail was flapping in the wind.

A hearty cheer broke from the privateer's crew as they saw the result of the shot, and the old man's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Rather a dangerous plaything, isn't it, sir?" remarked Nixon to the English captain.

The Englishman looked up into Walter's face, but he had nothing to say.

The sloop-of-war was now nearer, and Maynard had a better opportunity to show his skill. He loaded his gun with great care, and selected a ball that would admit of a snug canvass patch. It fitted tightly, and was rammed home.

"Now, if that ball don't deceive me, I'll make it tell on that craft," said the old man, as he took sight.

"Where are you aiming?"

"Higher than I did afore."

Again the long gun belched forth its sheet of smoke and flame, and the men anxiously looked for the effect of the shot.

"You made a mistake that time, old man," said the English captain, in a half exulting tone, as the smoke cleared away.

"You didn't hit, that's a fact," added Nixon.

"Didn't hit!" uttered the old gunner, in a tone of grief, as he looked at the sloop-of-war.

"No. But that's nothing. Try again. The Englishman hasn't begun to get near enough yet to do anything with his short carronades."

"Ha! Didn't I, though!" suddenly exclaimed Maynard, leaping on to the gun-carriage and clapping his hands in delight. "Just exactly where I aimed!"

All eyes were turned towards the enemy, and the meaning of the old man's exclamation was at once apparent. The Englishman's fore-topmast was seen to sway to and fro, and in a few moments it went over to leeward, carrying with it topsail, top-gallant-sail, royal, jib and flying-jib, and completely lumbering the deck with its wreck. Of course the sloop-of-war flew into the wind and lay utterly unmanageable.

"What d'ye think now, old feller?" uttered Maynard, turning towards the Englishman.

"Why, simply that you've won the day."

"You are an honest man. Shall I fire again, captain?"

"No. 'Twould be of no use. Of course we can't take her, and I have no wish to kill her men unnecessarily."

"O, I won't kill any men, but I do want to give her a few more shots. Her mainmast is too tall by half."

"Well, go on."

Maynard patched a round shot, and rammed home a chain-shot on top of it. The concussion heeled the brig over and made her tremble like a willow bough, but the effects of the shot were satisfactory, inasmuch as they resulted in the total destruction of the enemy's weather main-topmast rigging. Three more shots brought the main-topmast down, and Maynard stuck his match into the tub with a most emphatic "there!"

The crew of the privateer gave nine startling huzzas, and once more the Yankee Champion and her prize were on their way undisturbed, leaving the sloop-of-war hull down to leeward, bobbing about like a water-soaked log.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A PAIR OF SECRETS.

THE brig and her prize arrived safely in the harbor of Newburyport, and the occasion was a joyous one for the liberty-loving people. The wharves and docks were lined with eager spectators, and cheers, long and loud, rang out upon the air. The prize was found to be a most valuable one, and it was at once placed in the hands of the provincial agents, and when disposed of the privateer's crew found themselves richer than they had anticipated.

One day, after the business relating to the prize had been all disposed of, Nixon descended to his cabin in search for Jacob Maynard. The old man sat upon a stool, with his elbows resting upon the table, and his brow was buried in his hands. Walter was momentarily wonder-stricken. Big tears were rolling down the old gunner's face, and fast they followed each other as they fell upon the table. His bosom was heaving with emotion, and low murmurs were upon his lips. He gazed up as he heard the footfall of the young captain, and quickly he dashed the tears from his face.

"My faithful old friend, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"But there must be something to move you so?"

"I am light-headed, that's all."

Walter gazed upon the strangely working features of Maynard, and he could not fail of

seeing that they bore the marks of no ordinary grief.

"You are suffering from some cause," he said.

"No, no. I believe I shall go home this afternoon, and see my wife."

"And I'll go part of the way with you. I have business on the other side of the river."

"Good. Then you shall stop at my house."

"I will call in with pleasure. And now," continued Walter, at the same time laying a heavy bag upon the table; "here is your share of the prize-money. It is not so much as I wish it was, for I have paid every penny of the debts we contracted in remodelling our vessel."

"I don't want it, sir."

"Don't want it!" repeated Nixon, in astonishment.

"No, sir."

"Truly, Mr. Maynard, this is your full share. I had to pay the debts. I share equally with you," said Walter, in a tone that showed he felt somewhat hurt in his feelings.

"Captain Nixon, you misunderstand me," quickly returned the old man, rising from his seat. "I did not come on board here with the hopes of making money, but to spend the evening of my life in behalf of my country. Were I to live ten times the allotted age of man, I have more money now than I could ever spend."

Send the share you have set apart for me to George Washington."

If Nixon had been surprised before, he was lost in wonder now. He had thought Maynard to be a poor man. For a moment, however, the thought intruded itself upon him, that the old man might be really light-headed, and that the present was one of his vagaries.

"Are you in earnest in what you say?" he asked, as he laid his hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"Most assuredly I am."

"And you will not take your share of the prize-money?"

"I do not need it."

"But still it is yours."

"It belongs to Washington. Send it to him."

"With pleasure, if you insist."

"I do not insist, but I wish that it should be so."

Nixon watched the gunner's countenance narrowly, and he felt assured that he was not only in sober earnest, but that he was also in a sound and healthy mind.

"You have a noble soul, Maynard, and I would that America had more of such spirits upon her soil."

"I have an American soul—the soul of one who would see his country free! and I believe you can say the same."

A moment the mind of Walter Nixon ran back into the past, and a bright tear-drop gathered in his eye.

"I may have a noble soul, but at any rate I can say I have one that gives a home to no evil. Maynard, this sword was given me by my father when he was dying, and I swore then that it should not rest till my country was free, or my own arm was stiffened in death. Ah, old man, it was a momentous day on which I received this sword—a day, sir, that gave birth to a child that has even now become a giant, and which shall ere long grow to a power so mighty that the glittering crowns of earth shall pale before it. Already can it take bright hope in its bosom, and offer us fruition for the future."

"And that giant—"

"Is the spirit that burns in the great heart of the American colonies. When I took this faithful weapon from the hands of my dying father, my ears were open to the music of Yankee muskets, as the tyrant's hirelings fled before them."

"Where?"

"At Concord."

"Then you were there?"

"Yes. I was among those who drove the British from the old bridge."

"Then you did truly see the dawning of the most noble era history has given to the world—the era of a nation's independence. Walter Nixon, the British king can never place his foot again in power upon our soil. There must be blood shed—much, much,—and there must be dire thunders; but that blood shall be a noble price of a nation's redemption, and those thunders shall make other nations quake. 'Tis not for us—not for us, Walter—but for our children. Cold death shall still many a patriot's heart, before Liberty's sweet goddess can rule our land with her peaceful sway; but the memory of those who die shall live while honor and gratitude have a home on earth. It is a sweet thought that when we are gone from earth, future generations shall rise up and bless us, and it should make the martyred patriot's death-bed as soft and smooth as the downy cradle of a slumbering infant."

Walter gazed into the inspired face of the old man with awe. How changed he looked, and how different his voice. There was a pathos, a deep, powerful pathos, in his tones, and the young man felt his own soul inspired by them. What could it mean? What sort of man could he be?

For several minutes those two patriots, the old and the young, gazed intently into each other's faces without speaking. At length, the countenance of Maynard was lighted up as if by a sudden thought.

"Walter Nixon," he resumed, "were you born in Concord?"

"Yes," returned Walter.

"Was your father's name Nathan?"

"Yes."

"And his father's before him?"

"Yes. But why these questions?"

"I knew your father well."

"Did you ever live in Concord?"

"Yes. I was by the death-bed where your grandfather gave that old sword into the hands of your father."

"Jacob Maynard, do you speak truly now?"

"I was there, young man, and heard your father swear to live an honest and true life, and I believe he never broke his word."

"He never did," ejaculated Walter.

"And you will never break yours?"

"Never."

As the young man said this, he bent his eyes to the cabin floor, and his mind seemed to be anxiously at work. He pressed his hands upon his brow, and at length he looked up again into the old man's face. There was a look of deep study, a study almost painful, upon his features, and his lips moved nervously, as though they would drag forth to utterance the thoughts that had been lost. Soon there came a startling movement of his nerves, and Walter half sprang forward, but he stopped ere he reached his companion.

"What moves you so?" quickly asked the old man.

"It was but the memory of things that have passed," returned Walter, hesitatingly, and half abstractedly.

"And yet, you showed by your looks and movements that those things had to do with me."

"Did I?"

"Most certainly."

"I meant not to have shown it."

"But you did."

"Perhaps—" and Walter looked a peculiar look as he spoke—"I may have been a little light-headed!"

A faint smile broke over Jacob Maynard's face at this retort, but it soon passed away, and in a pleasant tone, he said:

"Well, we are even at that, though I would

fain know what were the thoughts that moved you so."

"You shall some time."

Maynard was not a man of many questions, and he did not further press the subject of his newly begotten curiosity, though he showed by his countenance that that curiosity had by no means grown less. Shortly afterwards he went on deck to see that his guns were blacked and polished previous to the admittance of visitors on board.

"I think I must be right," murmured Walter to himself, after the old man had gone.

"He's certainly the man of whom I have heard my father speak. Gracious heavens! if it be so, what a debt may I not owe him!"

After taking a careful look about the cabin, and placing a brace of pistols in his pocket, the young captain went on deck. During the forenoon there were hundreds of people from the shore came on board to view the gallant Champion, and many a fair lady's eye gleamed more brightly as she gazed upon the Yankee sailors. But Walter Nixon was the centre of attraction. Smiles were literally showered upon him, and a kind word from his lips was received with marked pleasure.

After dinner the captain and Maynard set out and crossed the river. Not far from the brick-yards stood the dwelling of the old man, and as Walter entered it, he was not a little surprised at the comfort and tastefulness of everything around him.

The meeting between the old patriot and his wife was an affecting one, and as our hero was introduced to the lady, he found her to be not only extremely affable, but evidently above the general class of society in intelligence and refinement. Her still bright and beautiful eyes sparkled with pride and pleasure as she heard of the privateer's exploits, and she blessed her husband for the part he had taken.

After three hours of social joy spent beneath Maynard's roof, Walter left, but promised that he would come back there and spend the night.

When he turned his steps away, it was to seek Helen Ryan. He thought he should find her!

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE FLIGHT. DEVELOPMENTS.

FOR a long and tedious hour, Luke Soper and his young charge kept on their way through the woods. They were obliged to keep the path, for the tangled underbrush would have impeded their progress too much; yet their path was but a narrow one, one hardly distinguishable in the darkness, and often had they lost it and been obliged to retrace their steps in order to regain it. They had no opportunity to think of the cold, nor did they notice it, for excitement and labor kept their blood in feverish circulation.

"We may walk slower, now," said Luke, "for I don't believe they'll find us if they come after us; and you must be tired, too."

"I am tired, Luke."

"So I should think. You breathe hard, an' your slender legs tremble, for I can hear 'em."

"Yes, they are weak. We have walked fast, Luke."

"So we have; but we had to. I declare, it's kind o' hard that a poor little fellow like you should have to run away for fear his own father'd kill him."

"Father! did you say?" quickly uttered the boy, gazing up through the darkness upon the indistinct outlines of his protector's countenance.

"Yes, that's what I said, cert'nly," returned Luke, with a sudden start.

"I am not fleeing from my father."

"Eh?"

"You know I am not, Luke."

"You be, cert'nly. Aint you goin' right away from his house?"

"Do you mean the house of Silas Ryan?"

"Of course."

"Luke Soper," said Gideon, in a slow, meaning tone, "you know that Silas Ryan is not my father!"

"Why, boy, who told you that?" asked Soper, with mingled surprise and uneasiness.

"Ryan himself told me."

"Did Silas Ryan tell you that he was not your father?"

"Yes. Listen to me, Luke. If you had a son like me, could you find it in your heart to kill him?"

"No, by the blood of the saints, I couldn't."

"Then has not Ryan told me by his own deeds that he is not my father?"

Luke walked on for some distance in silence. He was evidently pondering upon some subject that troubled him. At length he said:

"You've got hold of sunthin' more'n that, Gideon?"

"So I have, Luke. I heard what you said

when you prevented my false father from shooting me, and I then knew that the man who would have murdered me was not my father. Now was I not right? Don't lie to me—don't lie, Luke; but tell me honestly the truth. No word of mine shall betray you."

"Well," returned Luke, with some hesitation in his manner, "I don't s'pose there's any use in tryin' to deny what you've heard with your own ears, an' seen with your own eyes. Silas Ryan aint your father, nor never was, nor never will be. There!"

"O, I knew it, I knew it," ejaculated the boy in tones of fervency and thankfulness.

"The villain aint fit to be the father of a dog," said Luke; "an' of course he aint no right to claim kin with such as you an' your sweet sister be."

For some time the two picked their way through the dubious path in silence.

"Luke," at length asked Gideon, in a careful, guarded manner, "do you know who my father was?"

The man started more nervously than before, and Gideon felt his hand tremble violently, but he received no answer.

"Did you not know my father?" he repeated.

"Yes, Gideon, I did know him."

"And what became of him?"

"He died!" faintly articulated Luke, while he seemed half choked by some strange emotion.

"How did he die?"

"I could not tell you, boy."

"Do you not know, Luke?"

The boy could hear the quick, heavy breathing of his companion, and he could feel the trembling of the big, hard hand that led him onward.

"Don't, for heaven's sake, Gideon, ask me any more such questions. I've told you that Silas Ryan wasn't your father, an' I've saved you twice from his murderous hands. Why can't you let that do?"

"Because I would know more. Surely a child has a right to ask of his father?"

"But I can't tell you any more."

"And yet you know more, Luke."

"No more than I can tell."

"O, you must tell me. I know you will tell me more of my father."

"No, Gideon."

"Luke, you have a kind heart; I knew you have, or you wouldn't thus befriend me."

"You don't know anything about my heart," uttered the man, almost doggedly.

"Yes I do. Your actions speak for you. Tell me, Luke, do you remember your own father or mother?"

"I remember my mother, Gideon, but I haint much recollection about my father."

"And did you love your mother?"

"O, Gideon, I'm afraid I didn't love her as I ought to," returned Luke, with considerable emotion. "I've been a wicked wretch, an' I remember how my poor old mother used to cry because I was so bad. Nobody will ever know how many long, dark nights I have laid awake and wished that my mother was back again, so I could be kind to her. But 'tain't no use—what's done bad can't be called back to be done ever again. You must remember that, Gideon. Never do anything wrong, an' then you'll never have anything to make you as wretched as I have been."

"I don't mean to do anything wrong if I can help it," returned the boy, not a little moved by the remarks of his companion.

"Then you'll be a good man if you live."

"Now tell me, Luke," said Gideon, after a short silence, "suppose your mother had died, and you did not know where nor how, and then suppose you should find a man who knew all about it, would you not wish that he should tell you about it?"

"Perhaps I should."

"Yes, and I know you would. Now I ask you—and I beg of you, to tell me what became of my father."

"It's no use, it's no use, Gideon, you mustn't ask me."

"Luke Soper, I knew you will not tell me a lie."

"No, I won't."

"Then I'll ask you a plain, simple question. Was not my father murdered?"

"Murdered?" shrieked Luke, stopping short in the narrow path, as though he had seen some wild eye gleaming at him from the wood. "Who said he was murdered?"

"You said so, Luke."

"I didn't! I didn't! I didn't! I never said so. I never told a soul of it."

"You told of it on the same morning that your words gave me proof that Silas Ryan was not my father. Don't deny it now, Luke. Tell me, tell me, if it be so!"

"No, no—I won't tell you any more."

"But you must tell me this, Luke."

"Come, let's hurry on again," evasively uttered Soper. "We must not stop to talk any more. The river ain't far off."

"You cannot evade my question so," steadily persisted the boy, as they again moved forward. "You must tell me that."

Luke walked steadily on for several minutes without speaking, but when he did speak he showed by his tones and manner that his mind was settled upon a point from which he would not depart.

"Gideon," he said, "I'll answer that question, if you'll promise not to ask me any more."

"Well, Luke, I'll promise."

"And you won't ask me another question about your father?"

"No, not to-night."

"It don't make no odds whether you ask it to-night, or some other time, for I tell you plainly that I won't answer it when you do ask it. Your father was murdered!"

"O, may a just God forever blast the man who did the deed!" uttered the boy, in tones of deep feeling.

Luke Soper dropped the small hand he held and stopped again; but in a moment he seemed to recover himself, and once more reaching out for the hand of his young charge, he started on.

Some ten minutes were passed in a silence broken only by the crackling of the boughs and bushes beneath the feet of the travellers, and the low moaning of the night wind through the tall tree-tops. It was dark, very dark, in those

deep woods, and poor Gideon began to feel faint and weary. His ankles were pained, and his joints trembled with exertion.

"I cannot go much further, Luke," he said, as he leaned heavily on the hand of his guide.

"Bear up till we reach the river."

"How far is it?"

"Not far. Not over a quarter of a mile."

"Isn't that it we can hear now?"

"But we can't reach it only by this path."

We never could get through the — Hark!"

They both stopped suddenly.

"What is it, Luke?" asked the boy.

"I heard a noise behind us!"

As Soper spoke, he let go of Gideon's hand and knelt down upon the ground. A moment the boy stood unassisted, and then, as his limbs failed him, he sank down exhausted.

"It's somebody coming this way!" whispered Luke, with his ear close to the ground. "It's a man, I know by the tread! Come, Gideon, we must hurry."

"I cannot go any further, Luke."

"But you must. The whole party are after us, of course, and if we're found we shall both be killed. If 'twas only Silas Ryan, I wouldn't care; but the others will shoot us. Come, come, or you'll never see your sister again."

At that thought the boy started up, and by exertion of his whole remaining strength he got upon his feet.

"Ha! there's a light! See it flash through the bushes? Come!"

As Soper spoke, he caught the boy by the hand and started on again; but he could not go far, for Gideon was utterly unable to keep upon his feet. Under ordinary circumstances he might have stood a much severer trial, but long and intense anxiety and suffering had made him sick, and even before he left his bed he had been far from strong and well.

"Can't you stand it to the river?"

"No, no, I cannot walk."

"Then I must carry you. We must gain the river."

Soper lifted the boy in his stout arms as he spoke, and with hurried strides he dashed on through the deep wildwood.

## CHAPTER XVII.

A FEARFUL DWINDLING OF THE TORY LEAGUE.

HE who bore the weakened form of the boy was a strong, powerful man, but it soon became evident to him that he was followed by a foot swifter than his own. Had he been alone and unburdened he would have stood a better chance, but the weight of his load was a serious impediment, not only in the amount of strength thus bestowed, but also in the additional difficulty of getting along through the overhanging bushes. The pursuer was gradually gaining, and Luke knew it, and he knew, too, that he could not reach the river without being overtaken. For an instant he stopped, and he could distinctly hear the crackling of the dry sticks behind him.

"Gideon," said he, "we must hide. We can crawl in under the bushes and let that man pass us."

"And is he so near us?" faintly asked the boy.

"Yes, he's almost up with us."

"Perhaps I could walk now. Let me try. I must be a great hindrance to you."

"You couldn't walk ten steps, boy. Come, let us crawl in here somewhere."

Luke could not see the nature of the covert he sought, but he set the boy upon the ground, and at a venture he crawled into the nearest place. The bushes were thick, and some few seared and yellow leaves still clung to them, and as soon as he had reached a point where he thought he might be free from observation, he stopped and turned his face towards the path, at the same time drawing Gideon closer to him and letting his head rest upon his lap.

Nearer and nearer came the pursuer, and at length Luke could see the rays of light that came struggling through the bushes. Suddenly the man stopped, but it was only for an instant. Luke drew a heavy pistol from his bosom and cocked it. At length the man came opposite to where the fugitives were hidden, and as the light he carried flashed in, his face Luke could see that it was Wimper.

The Indian passed the spot, and Soper felt relieved, but it was only for a moment, for soon the pursuer stopped again, and Luke could see that he was holding his lantern down to the ground. Luke saw at once that the Indian's quick eye would detect the spot where the feet

prints left the path, and he clutched his pistol with a firmer grip.

"—ah!" he lowly whispered, bending his lips close to the ear of the boy; "don't let a breath of noise come from your lips. He's found out that we haint gone no further."

At this moment the Indian started up from his search, and uttered a long, loud shout, which was soon answered by a voice not far to the left, nearer the river.

"Here, here, this way," cried the Indian.

Another response was heard, and then Wimper held his lantern to the ground, and began slowly to retrace his steps. Luke could see that he held a pistol in his right hand, and he knew that if he was discovered he would be surely shot. At length Wimper came to the spot where the foot-marks ceased, and a slight exclamation broke from his lips.

Luke knew that in another moment he would be seen. The distance was not over ten feet, and there was a straight line through the intricacies of the wildwood. He aimed his pistol—the villain saw him—but 'twas too late. Soper fired before Wimper could raise his own weapon. There was a sharp cry broke from the Indian's lips—he staggered back a few paces, and fell. The lantern had fallen in an upright position, and it still burned.

The scene and the circumstance had aroused the energies of the boy, and as he saw his enemy fall, he quickly uttered:

"Now let us go, Luke. I am stronger now, and I know I could reach the river."

"No, no, there are more to come yet. The man who answered Wimper was not far off."

"But he may not be able to get through the thick bushes."

"Yes he will. He was in the wide path, and he can easily cross over to here. Ha! there he comes. Don't you hear his steps?"

The crackling of the bushes could be plainly heard, and ere long a man emerged from them and entered the narrow path not more than two rods above the place where Wimper had fallen. He at once detected the light and made for it, and as he came up Soper could see from

his hiding-place that it was Goss. The tory picked up the lantern, and as he turned it round, its rays fell upon the stiff corpse of the Indian. He sprang forward and held the light down to the pale face.

"My God!" he uttered, starting back in alarm, "it's Wimper!" I wonder if he's dead?" he continued, as he again approached the body and laid his hand upon the face. "Dead! Where's the man that did it?"

As Goss spoke he turned about and cocked his pistol.

"Give me your pistol, quick!" whispered Luke.

Gideon drew the weapon from the place where he had put it and handed it to his companion.

Goss had begun to gaze up and down the edge of the bushes, and at length his light was turned towards the spot where the fugitives were hidden. Luke did not wait to be discovered this time, but at the first opportunity he took a deliberate aim and fired. Goss dropped the lantern and started back. At that instant Luke heard the crashing of bushes further below him, and he knew that the others were coming up to the scene. His pistols were both empty, and he had no other ready weapon. Goss was feebly staggering against the opposite shrubbery, and with a moment's thought he sprang from his covert. He seized the lantern, the light in which was still burning, and set it upright. Then he started towards Goss, but before he could lay his hand upon him the villain fell. Luke caught up the pistols that had been dropped by the two tories, and leaving the lantern where it stood, he leaped quickly into the thicket just as Silas Ryan and Dow came into the path.

The two remaining tories came up to where the light was burning, and their eyes were greeted by the bodies of their fallen companions. Ryan caught up the lantern and looked at the faces of the dead men. He touched them with his feet, and turned them half over, but they fell heavily back again.

"Death and perdition!" he startingly cried,

as he turned towards Dow, "'tis Goss and Wimper!" They are both dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Dow, shaking from head to foot with fear.

"Yes, as dead as stones."

"Egad, Ryan, let's you and I go back to the house, or we shall be dead, too."

"O, heavens!" uttered Ryan, without seeming to notice what his companion had said; "that makes four of our league—dead!"

"And all through the means of that boy of yours," said Dow.

"But it wasn't my fault. These men's blood does not rest on my hands," uttered Ryan, gazing upon the upturned face of the Indian.

"Of course it don't," responded Dow, drawing a little nearer to the corpse-laden spot. "There isn't any blood on my hands, nor on yours."

"Who said there was blood on my hands?" exclaimed the old tory, turning suddenly upon his companion.

"Nobody. There aint no blood on them. I said there wasn't," returned Dow, at the same time slightly shrinking beneath the wild look of Ryan.

"Ha, ha, ha!" hysterically laughed the gray-headed villain. "It's all washed off long ago. My hands are clean, Dow, clean, I say!"

"I know they be. But come, let's go back to your house. 'Taint safe to stay here. We shall both be shot."

"But the boy—I dare not let him go."

"Egad! what's that, Ryan?" exclaimed Dow, as his eye caught the outlines of the boy where the light shone upon him through the bushes.

"Where?" cried Ryan, starting to the side of his companion.

"Back, villains!" shouted Luke, in a voice of thunder, as he leaped from the spot where he had stood.

Both the tories started and turned towards the new-comer.

"Don't shoot! Don't," gasped Dow. "I didn't mean to hurt you. They made me come."

Luke paid no attention to the cringing coward, but springing towards Ryan he struck him a blow in the pit of the stomach that settled him upon the turf like a rag. Once more he set the lantern upon the ground, and having secured Ryan's pistol and placed it in his pocket, he turned towards Dow.

"Now start for your home, you brandy-bloated villain, or I'll shoot you like a dog! Start!"

Dow waited to hear no more, nor did he think of looking after the fate of the companion he left behind, but turning quickly upon his heel he fled as fast as his legs would carry him.

By the time Dow had got out of sight, Ryan had arisen to his feet. Luke picked up the lantern, and holding a cocked pistol in his hand, he faced his *soi-disant* master.

"Soper, did you kill these men?" asked the old tory, in a trembling, fearful tone.

"Yes, I did, Silas Ryan. I told you I would watch over and protect that boy, and when I said so, I meant it. I didn't think you would try to kill him again."

"I didn't try to kill him."

"Don't blacken your soul any more, Silas Ryan. God knows our souls are both black enough now, but yours is the worst. I heard you when you were planning for killing the boy, for I was listening, and I knew well enough what you wanted to draw lots for. But I have kept my oath so far, and I can keep it farther. I've killed three of your party, an' you may be the next! My hand won't tremble if you run yourself across my path, for 'twould be a virtue to kill such a man as you are; but I don't want to do it. We've run our race too near together for that. But you shan't harm the boy for all that."

Ryan gazed into the face of the man before him, but he did not speak—he could not. The time, the place, the scene, and the circumstances, all combined to affect him thus. His face was of a livid hue, and he trembled like a ghost-frightened girl. He turned his eyes furtively about him. The dim rays of the lantern seemed only to make the surrounding darkness more

fearful, and the low moaning of the wind sounded in his ears like the judgment knell. At his feet lay the blood-stained corpses of two of his companions in crime; at his house lay another waltering in his stiffened gore, while before him, like a grim monster, stood the dread avenger who had done it all!

"Go back to your home, Silas Ryan, and leave the boy with me. I will meet you there again."

"Luke," gasped the terror-stricken, miserable wretch, "you have not betrayed me?"

"No, nor will I if you leave me now. Go home, and when I return I'll come out here and help you bury these bodies."

The old tory cast one more glance upon the

cold, stiff bodies of Wimper and Goss, and without another word he turned away from the spot. He did not even ask for his pistol. In a few moments more he had passed from sight.

"Come, Gideon, our way is clear now."

The boy crept out from his hiding-place, and gave his hand to Luke. He was stronger now, and ere long they reached the river. A small boat was found, in which they crossed over to the southern shore, and at the end of half an hour more they reached the dwelling of an old Quaker, named Simon Goodhue, with whom Luke seemed to be acquainted. No questions were asked by the friend, but taking Gideon kindly by the hand he led him into the house, and Luke Soper followed.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TORIES LAY PLANS, AND HAVE A LISTENER.

ON the morning following the events last recorded, Helen Ryan arose from her bed and dressed herself. She knew by the sensation produced upon the nerves of her sightless eyes that it was broad daylight, and she wondered that her brother had not called her as was his wont. Perhaps he was not up, she thought, and she went to the door of his room, pushed it open, and called to him. She received no answer, and she turned to descend the stairs. Perhaps it was fortunate for her at that moment that she could not see, for she was saved from the sight of the fearful scene that chamber revealed!

In the kitchen she found no fire. It was cold, bitter cold. All was still as death in the place, for even the old clock had run down. An undefinable sensation of dread crept over the soul of the poor blind girl, and she whispered the name of her brother. She dared not speak it aloud, for even the sound of her own voice startled her. Again and again she whispered that name, but no answer was returned. She went to the front door and listened, but she heard not the footfall of him she sought. She

would have gone forth, but she was too cold, and she shrank back into the house.

Then it was that a horrible fear came over her. She knew that Ryan had once sought Gideon's life, and like an ice-bolt came the thought that she might now be brotherless! A strange strength seemed to pervade her frame, for she sprang back towards the chamber stairs and ascended to her brother's room. She moved to the bed, and ran her hand over its surface, but she found it empty. She called again his name, and then she turned. Her foot struck against a prostrate body, and a sharp cry of alarm broke from her lips. Quickly she stooped, and her delicate fingers traversed over the form that had arrested her. She felt the sharp beard, the smooth hair, and the neatly tied neckcloth, and she felt, too, how cold and rigid the body was.

"'Tis not my brother! 'tis Baxter! But what did he here? 'O, heavens! perhaps they have murdered him yet! Gideon, Gideon! 'O, my brother, where are you? Answer me. 'Tis Helen, your sister, that calls!'"

A death-like silence only gave back the echo



of her own voice in reply, and with a heavy groan she sank back upon the bed. When she would have arisen she was startled by the sound of heavy footsteps upon the stairs, which her quick ear told her were Ryan's, and she also heard the steps of another following him.

"Ha! what are you doing here?" exclaimed Ryan, starting back as his eyes fell upon the spirit-like form of the blind girl.

"I am seeking my brother," she returned, as she arose from her sitting posture. She shuddered fearfully as she spoke, for the sound of that harsh voice was like the cry of a demon in her ears.

"Your brother is not here."

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know. Go and seek him."

"Have they killed him? O, tell me, father, have they killed him?"

"Killed him!" repeated Ryan, with an ashy look. "No."

"Then tell me where he is?"

"I don't know where he is. Perhaps he is on some further plan to betray his father again."

"Father?"

The word that thus fell from Helen's lips was but a mere, self-murmured whisper, but Silas Ryan caught it, and it made him turn pale.

"Tell me," continued the blind girl, who knew not that she had been heard, "what means this fearful thing here in this chamber?"

"What thing?"

"This dead man by my brother's bedside."

"I don't know any better than you do," returned Ryan, who had been regaining his self-possession, and who saw by the incoherency of the girl's questions that she had no thought beyond the safety of her brother. "He's dead, and that's all I know about it. Perhaps he died in a fit."

"No, no—I felt the blood! the cold, frozen blood!"

"Then somebody's killed him."

"Egad, Ryan," whispered Dow, who had followed his leader up; "get that girl off out of the way, for we must dispose of Baxter's body as soon as possible."

"Go below, Helen," said Ryan.

The poor girl waited for no further orders, but feeling her way past the two men, she passed from the room, and descended once more to the kitchen. She was just upon the point of sinking into a chair when she thought she heard her name pronounced in a low whisper.

"Gideon!" she uttered, starting towards the quarter from whence the sound proceeded.

"'Tis not Gideon, it's Luke," returned the voice, from the back window which opened to the shed. "Come out here."

Helen hurried to the back door, felt out the bolt, and threw it back, and passed out into the shed.

"Luke," she whispered, "O, do you know what has become of my brother?"

"Yes, Helen, he's safe."

"Safe! O, say that word again!"

"He's safe, girl, and he's where Silas Ryan can't touch him, either."

"But is he alive?"

"Alive?" repeated Luke, with a puzzled look. "Why, how could he be safe if he wasn't alive?"

"Luke, the cold grave would be safer than this house!"

The rough man was moved by that expression.

"So it would," he returned; "but Gideon is both alive and safe."

The blind girl clasped her hands in silent ecstasy, and her lips moved with an inaudible prayer.

"Didn't Ryan and Dow come into the house a little while ago?" asked Luke, as he drew Helen further from the open window.

"Yes, yes."

"And where be they now?"

"In my brother's chamber. O, Luke, there is a horrible sight up there!"

"How do you know? You can't see."

"But I can feel. Baxter has been murdered, and he lays by my brother's bed."

"He wasn't murdered, Helen. I killed him myself. He went up there to murder Gideon, and the rest sent him up, but I saved him; and I've come now to save you."

"And will you carry me where Gideon is?"

"Yes, that's what I've come for."

"Then may God bless you, Luke—God bless you. You have a kind, a noble heart."

"Do you really mean to pray for God to bless me, Helen?"

"Yes, yes, indeed I do; and I'll pray for you as long as I live."

There was a big tear in the eye of Luke Soper, and his lips quivered with an emotion that was new to his soul. For a moment he half averted his face, as though he feared that even the blind girl might see the thoughts that dwelt there.

"They have gone up to bring the body down?" he whispered, at length.

"Yes, for I heard Dow say something about it."

"Then as soon as they go out of the house you must run up to your room and put on your cloak, and get what clothes you want, and then come back here again. I'll hide so that they won't see me, and as soon as they get out of sight we'll start for the woods. Hurry now."

Helen did not wait to ask any more questions, for her mind was active in its conclusions, and she knew that Luke had told her the truth. At that moment she heard a heavy tread upon the stairs, and quickly she re-entered the kitchen and shut the door.

Luke Soper hid himself behind a pile of wood in the shed, where he could watch the movements of any one who might leave the house; and shortly afterwards the back door was again opened, and Ryan and Dow came out. They bore the stiff corpse of Baxter in their arms, and as they entered the shed they laid their burden down upon the very place behind which Luke had taken shelter. He trembled with fear, for he thought that perhaps they meant to place the body behind the wood till night. Soper placed his hand carefully upon the butt of one of his pistols.

"Egad, Ryan," uttered Dow, as he puffed with the effects of the exertion he had put forth; "this has been a sorry business for us. Out of

our six brave fellows there's only you and me left."

Ryan gazed upon the face of the corpse, and a look of agony settled upon his countenance.

"It's bad!" he murmured.

"Egad, there's no mistake. Now, what's to be done? Let's leave this body here, and clear out. I don't want to carry it any further, I don't like it."

"We must not leave it here, Dow. We must carry it to the woods and bury it. Some one may pass this way."

"And then what shall we do?" asked Dow.

"Good heavens, I don't know!" groaned Silas Ryan. "Luke Soper and the boy are at liberty, and I know not where to go. I must hunt up that boy by some means."

"Didn't you say Soper was coming back to help you take care of Wimper and Goss?"

"Yes."

"Egad, then let's hide, and shoot him when he comes."

"Shoot him!" repeated Ryan, with a start.

"Yes, it's the easiest thing in the world. We can hide when we see him coming, and shoot him when he don't know it. Egad, that'll be killing two birds with one stone, for you won't do anything with the boy as long as he's alive."

Silas Ryan trembled with fierce excitement. He pressed his hand upon his contracted brow, and for some time he stood in deep thought.

"We will do it!" he said at length. "You will shoot him, Dow."

"Egad, yes. He'll come to-day, won't he?"

"I expect he will."

"Then we'd better clear out as soon as he's disposed of, and leave the boy alone."

"No," returned Ryan, with a demoniac look.

"I have two jobs to do yet, and I'll perform them, or die in the attempt."

"That may be all very well for you, Silas Ryan, but roll me down hill in a brandy-pipe if I have any desire to die just yet."

"But you would have no objections to getting a few hundred pounds to put in your purse?"

"Of course not."

"Then you have the chance. That infernal Captain Nixon, if I am not mistaken, will be this way before a great while, and, dead or alive, I'm to have eight hundred pounds for his body. I know he'll come here to see Helen, for, I heard her tell Gideon so, and I tell you, Dow, if he does come, he's a dead man! I shan't try to make him a prisoner, but I'll shoot him down! Now let's carry this load to the woods, and then we'll come back and bide our time. There's Mason, Baxter, Wimper and Goss! but they shall be revenged! Nixon, Soper, and the boy shall die! Come, Dow, you lift the feet. That's it. Steady."

"Hold on! That gal won't be running away, will she?"

"No. She couldn't get far if she should try."

The two men lifted the corpse upon their shoulders and passed out from the shed. The way they went towards the woods lay to the eastward of the house, and ere long they were out of sight.

Soper crept from his hiding-place and gazed off in the direction they had taken. There was an expression of peculiar triumph upon his features, and his eyes sparkled with intense fire.

"Now, Silas Ryan," he muttered to himself, "you have fairly cut the oath that bound us. You have planned to kill me. I don't owe you anything now. My oath is of no use. We'll see who dies first. I've just as good as sold you my soul, and now you want my life. Take it if you can get it!"

As Luke closed his meaning soliloquy he entered the kitchen, where he found Helen waiting for him. She had thrown on her cloak and hood, and she had also prepared a small bundle.

"Are you ready?" asked Luke.

"Yes. Let us leave this place as soon as

possible. This roof has given me shelter from the storms of heaven for twelve long years, but God grant that I may never enter it again."

"Then come. We must hurry. Silas Ryan may be back before long."

Luke gave the blind girl his hand, and half lifting her along he hastened from the house. The way he took was directly towards the river, and the buildings shielded his retreat from the observation of any one who might be watching from the direction taken by Ryan and Dow. He was not long in reaching the water, where he had left the boat he had come in, and having lifted Helen on board, he leaped in and pushed off.

Within two hours he hauled the boat up on the opposite bank, and having assisted Helen to the shore, he started off towards the dwelling of Simon Goodhue, which stood only a short distance.

"Gideon, Gideon! My brother! O, where is he?" cried the blind girl, as she entered the kind old Quaker's dwelling.

"Here, my sister," murmured the boy, as he sprang forward, and caught the lovely being to his arms. "Safe, safe, sweet sister."

The old Quaker and his wife stood by and witnessed the scene. They saw the tears course down those young cheeks, and they heard the soft, sweet, heart-sent murmurs of thanksgiving that arose from those two pure souls; and they wiped their own eyes as the warm drops of sympathy welled up there.

"Thee may rest in peace here, fair children," uttered Simon, as he approached the brother and sister. "The kind man who brought thee here has told me thy story of wrongs. I am not a man of war, but Simon Goodhue can nevertheless shoot the wolf that would devour his lambs!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

AN ADVENTURE. THE LIFE-TIDE OF VILLAGERES EASTER TET.

It was on the evening of the same day that Helen had been placed beneath the roof of the Quaker, that Walter Nixon left the dwelling of Jacob Maynard, on his way to the tory's cottage. It was just nightfall when he reached the small opening within which the house stood, and with an eager step he approached it. His heart beat with a quicker motion as he noticed that no lights were burning, and an indescribable sensation of fear crept over him. He went up to the door and knocked, but no one answered the summons. He knocked again, more loudly than at first, but with the same result. All was still and quiet within, as for several moments he hearkened. He placed his hand upon the latch, and found that the door was not fastened. Without hesitation he pushed it open and entered.

The kitchen was cold and cheerless, and Walter knew by the feeling of the atmosphere that there had been no fire there through the day.

"Gone! All gone!" he murmured, as he gazed about through the gloom.

The dull echo of his own voice sounded dismal, and he was half startled by its strange

tones. He felt assured that the house was empty, and for some time he stood undecided as to what course he should pursue. At length his eye caught the dim outlines of a lamp and a tinder-box upon the table, and he resolved that he would search the house. He easily found the flint and steel, and he also felt some matches that lay upon the table. It was but the work of a few moments to strike a light, and as soon as the lamp was lighted, he began to look about him. Upon the table lay an old Bible, and by the side of it were five strips of paper.

"She cannot have been gone long," he said to himself; "for here is her Bible from which her brother had been doubtlessly reading to her, and here are some marks that have been taken out and left. *One, two, three, four.*—What does that mean? *Kn-i-f-e! Knife!* Those papers were cut for *lots*—that is a strange word to be placed at the hazard of a draft."

Walter gazed upon the papers in a thoughtful mood, and abstractedly he cast his eyes upon the floor. They rested upon a dark spot in a line between the door that led from the stair-

way and the one that opened to the shed. He took the lamp and approached it. It was a clod of frozen blood!

"Just heavens!" he cried, as he started back and set the lamp again upon the table, "what means this? There have been devils at work here! But that cannot be *her* blood! A devil, even, could not have harmed her."

At that moment Walter thought he heard the sound of footsteps without, and on turning about, was confident that he saw a human face at the window, but it disappeared the moment he had caught it. Then followed a low hum of voices, as if of two persons in an eager conversation, and starting back a few paces from the table, Walter drew both of his pistols and cocked them. Hardly had he done so, when the front door was opened, and in stalked Silas Ryan and Dow, the latter keeping safely behind his leader. Ryan started quickly back as he noticed the pistols, and in so doing he liked to have sent Dow sprawling upon the floor.

"Who are you?" asked Walter, still holding his weapons ready for use.

"And who are you?" returned Ryan.

"Answer my question first."

The old tory saw that the man who thus stood before him did not know him, and in an instant he resolved to play a false character. He mistrusted Walter Nixon in a moment, both from his dress and his general appearance.

"Your question is easily answered," he replied, "though I can't say that I like the manner of your asking it. We are travellers, and seek shelter here for the night."

Ryan's hopes of speedy and easy success in the capture of the privateer captain gave him an unwonted amount of confidence, and he found himself much better able to play his part than he had anticipated. The only danger he anticipated was from the clownishness of Dow, and by way of admonition he contrived to tread on his companion's toe.

"Do you know the man who resides here?" asked Walter.

"No, I don't. And now, stranger, if it

wouldn't be an impudent question, who are you?"

"A man, like yourself, perhaps, though I did not come here accidentally," returned Walter. "I came to seek one whom I expected to find here."

"O,—then you don't belong to the house?"

"No," answered our hero.

As Walter made that answer, a vague suspicion flashed across his mind that all was not as the two men would have it appear. Ryan had been a little too offhanded. The very manner in which he had at first addressed him proved that he knew the person to whom he spoke did not belong to the house. From that moment our hero had his eyes open.

"Who are you seeking here?" asked the old tory.

"A girl named Helen Ryan."

"O, you won't find her here, sir," quickly returned Dow. "She's—"

The unlucky man met the thundering look of Ryan, and he stopped. Walter noticed the movement, though he showed it not, and turning to Dow, he said:

"And how do you know?"

"Because she ain't here."

"But how do you know that?"

"My friend judges from the appearance of the place, I presume," returned Ryan, coming quickly to the aid of his obtuse companion.

"The appearance of this room, which is evidently the only room for cooking in the house, shows pretty conclusively that there can be no one here but ourselves."

"Perhaps you are right," said Walter. And then placing his left-hand pistol in his bosom, he continued, as he raised the lamp:

"I believe, however, I shall satisfy myself of the fact by examining the chambers above."

A shade of uneasiness passed over the features of Ryan, but he soon composed himself, and by one of the most impressive aspects he was capable of giving, he managed to hold Dow quiet.

"Are you going to leave us in the dark, sir?" said the old man, with much coolness.

"O, there's no need of that," returned Walter. "You can accompany me."

"No—we'll remain here."

"Just as you please. I sha'n't be gone long." And as Walter thus said, he opened the door that led to the chambers, and passed through.

"Good thunder! Ryan, you ought not to have let him gone up stairs," uttered Dow, as soon as Walter had gone.

"What's the hurt?"

"Hurt? Why, he'll see the blood on Gideon's floor."

"And what if he does! It wouldn't be half so dangerous as your accursed stupidity liked to have proved."

"O, don't blame me, Ryan, for I didn't exactly understand what you were up to. Egad, but that was a glorious thought of yours. He don't suspect that we belong here."

"I don't believe he suspects anything yet."

"But then you ought not to have let him gone up there."

"Don't be a fool, Dow. Dead men tell no tales. That man is Walter Nixon, and he goes not from this place alive. Now we must lay a plan to destroy him."

"Egad, we'll shoot him."

"Yes, but where?"

"Right here—when he comes back."

"No, Dow," returned Silas Ryan, with a shudder. "I want no more blood spilled in this house. Every drop spilt here will come upon our own heads. We must despatch him out of doors."

"He seems like a sharp one," suggested Dow.

"And so he is," said Ryan. "If we would shoot him easily, we must be careful how we operate. You saw how stubbornly he persisted in holding a loaded pistol in his hand. Now my plan is this. I will go out doors and hide myself behind the corner of the shed, and when he comes down he will naturally inquire where I have gone. You must tell him we have a boat down to the river, and that I have gone down after some things we left in it. Then tell him that since he has been gone there was a

girl came to the door and went away again around the shed. Be sure and tell him she hasn't been gone more than two minutes, and of course he'll start at once after her. Then as soon as he comes around the corner, I'll clasp a pistol to his head and fire—and he is a dead man! Now do you expect you can do that without a blunder?"

"Of course I can," returned Dow, who seemed to be highly pleased at the idea of not having any shooting to do.

"You must be perfectly free and easy, now."

"Certainly I will. Egad, we'll have him shot now, won't we?"

"It can't very well fail, if you are careful."

"O, I'll be careful—don't fear. Eight hundred pounds. Egad, Ryan, go right out. I'll do up the gal business—see if I don't."

Silas Ryan examined the priming of his pistol by feeling of it with his finger, and having assured himself that the pan was full, he shut the steel down, and turned from the room. Once he stopped, but in a moment he went on again, and could one have seen his face, a shade of strange doubt and misgiving would have been found resting upon it.

When Walter Nixon ascended the stairs, instead of going directly on towards the door of the room where Gideon had slept, he turned to the right, and entered an apartment, the door of which was open. The lamp he carried threw a comparatively strong light around, and he saw that he stood within the apartment which had been occupied by Helen. A few articles of female wearing apparel lay scattered around in confusion, and a box which stood in one corner, the cover of which was thrown back, appeared to have been hastily ransacked. At first a fearful dread seized upon him, but soon his calmer reason came to his aid, and he saw that all about him gave signs of a sudden flight, and he allowed himself to hope that things might not be so bad after all.

When he left this room he proceeded at once to that which had been occupied by Gideon. He pushed open the door and entered, but he suddenly retreated in horror. The floor was

covered with frozen pools and gouts of blood! Walter knew by the size of the bed, and by a few articles of clothing that hung up in the room, that it was where the patriot boy had slept. For some moments his brain was in a painful whirl of chaotic excitement, and with starting eye-balls he gazed upon the gore-laden floor.

"Here's been a murder most foul; but is there a fiend on earth that could have killed that boy? I cannot believe it, and yet this is his chamber, and perhaps this is his blood!"

Walter leaned upon the bed, and sat for some moments in thought.

"As I live," he uttered to himself, starting up from the bedside, "I believe that man below is Silas Ryan! He looks the very villain in every feature. But they cannot deceive me so easily. That was a miserable, abortive attempt to palm themselves off as strangers to this place. Come forth, my faithful pistols. They shall give me answer for this. They are cowards—miserable cowards. 'Tis Silas Ryan—I know it."

Walter carefully examined his pistols as he ceased—poured out the old priming and put in fresh, and then carefully cocking them both, he took the lamp between his thumb and finger and descended to the room below, where he found Dow sitting alone by the table.

"Ah, where is your companion?" inquired Walter Nixon, as soon as he had assured himself that the man whom he sought was not in the room.

Dow turned pale as a ghost at the sight of the two pistols, and as Walter stepped forward and set the lamp upon the table, the tory actually started from his seat in affright.

In an instant the young captain saw with whom he had to deal, and his course of action was laid out.

"O, don't be alarmed," he said, in a mild tone. "Where has your companion gone?"

"Why," returned Dow, gaining courage from the young man's manner, and settling into his seat again, "you see we came up the river in a boat of our own, and when we came up to

this house we left some things in the boat that we don't hardly wish to have stay there over night, so he has gone down after them. That's all, upon my honor, sir. Egad, it is."

"Now, my dear sir," said Walter, in a calm, easy tone, while he bent his eyes sharply upon the man before him, "I have a little piece of advice to give you. I am going to put you a few questions, and I want them answered in a straight-forward manner, and I don't want you to utter a tone louder than is barely necessary for me to hear. You do not wish to die at present, I suppose?"

"O, no, sir!"

"Sit still, sir!"

"O, sir, don't point that pistol at me so. It's cocked, and if it should go off it would murder me! Don't, sir!"

"Hush! Utter another sound as loud as that, and you are a dead man!"

"O, I won't, I won't, if you only just won't kill me."

A smile of derision passed over Walter's features as he glanced upon the cowering villain, and still holding the pistol at an aim, he said:

"Now don't tell me a lie. Beware, if you do. Who is that man who was here when I left the room?"

"He's a—O, don't hold that pistol so near."

"Who is he?—I asked you," came from Walter's lips, in long drawn, fearfully emphasized parts.

"He's Silas Ryan!" fearfully uttered Dow, with lips as livid as a lightning-scathed flesh-spot.

"You answer me well," said the young man, with a glowing eye. "Now what is your name?"

"Ichabod Dow, sir."

"A very good name, indeed. And now, sir, I have a question of still greater importance to ask you. Remember—if you would live, answer me at once, and with truth. What have become of Gideon and Helen Ryan?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Ah!"

"As God is my judge, sir, I do not know. O, don't shoot me. If I should die at this moment I couldn't tell you any more."

"Have they not been killed?"

"No, sir—no, sir."

"Neither of them?"

"No, sir."

"Then how came they to leave this house?"

"Because—"

"Answer!"

"O, don't! Because they would have been murdered if they staid here!"

"Who would have murdered them?"

"There wouldn't anybody have killed them both, but Baxter set out to destroy the boy!"

"And did not Ryan have a hand in it?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And you drew lots to see who should do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now whose blood is that in the boy's chamber?"

"It's Baxter's, sir."

Thus, by degrees, did Walter drain from Dow all the intelligence he could have wished. He not only learned the circumstances attending the flight of the boy, and the disappearance of the girl, of the fate of Baxter, Wimper and Goss, but he also learned the plans of Ryan respecting himself.

"Now," he said, as soon as he had gained all the intelligence he could hope for, "tell me where Silas Ryan is at this moment."

Dow answered the question truly, though he gave not the exact locality of the old tory's hiding place.

"Now understand ye, Ichabod Dow. Go out and tell him to come in here; but tell him not to bring a weapon in his hands, for if he does he dies ere he crosses the threshold of that door. I shall leave the light here upon the table, and I shall so console myself that I can see without being seen, so he dies if he comes in armed. Go, sir, and tell him."

Dow turned tremblingly away and left the room. Walter felt sure that all he had heard was true, and he believed that Helen Ryan and her brother were in a place of safety. Indeed,

he was convinced of it, for from what Dow had told him of Soper, he made up his mind that such a man would not desert the beings he had taken in charge at so much personal danger, until they were perfectly safe.

The young man's mind was busy with such reflections, when he was startled by the report of a pistol near the house. At first he thought it might have been fired at random for him, but the idea dwelt with him only for an instant, and holding his weapons both ready for use, he hurried forth into the yard and turned in the direction from which the sound seemed to have proceeded. He had not gone many steps when his eye caught the outlines of a man near the corner of the shed, in a kneeling posture. As he approached, however, the man started to his feet, and standing a moment in that position, he turned and hastened off at a swift run towards the woods. Walter could see by the height and size of the figure that it was Ryan.

He did not stop to gaze long after the fleeing man, for he heard a deep groan at the spot from which Ryan had fled, and hastening up he found Dow stretched upon the frosty sward.

"O, Silas Ryan," groaned the fallen man.

"This isn't Ryan. He's fled and left you."

"Is it you, Captain Nixon?"

"Yes," returned the young man, bending down and raising the head of the tory in his lap.

Dow strained his faltering eye, but he seemed not to have the power of discovering objects around him, for he looked not into the face of Walter, though he evidently sought it.

"O, captain, do you believe I shall die?" he said, in fearful accents.

"I don't know. Where are you shot?"

"Here—here," returned Dow, painfully raising his hand to his left breast.

"Did Silas Ryan do it?"

"Yes. He thought 'twas you."

"Then I have reason to thank him for his mistake."

"But you don't think I shall die, sir."

"I don't see how you can help it," returned Walter, as he placed his finger upon Dow's wrist, and found that the pulse was weakening fast.

"O, I'm not fit to die!" groaned the wretch. "My soul is black with sin."

"You should have thought of that before. You might have escaped this fate had you been true to your country."

"If I die, Silas Ryan will be the only one left. He got us all to join him, and now we must all die and leave him behind to pocket the gold."

"Think not of gold now, Ichabod Dow," said the young man, while a bitter sneer escaped him. "Silas Ryan will be worse off than you. The world of spirits contains not a soul more thoroughly guilty than is Ryan's at this moment."

For several moments the dying man writhed and groaned in pain, but at length he seemed easier as he became more weak, and with considerable effort he said:

"Captain Nixon, I can do one good deed before I die. Beware of Silas Ryan. He has sworn by a most terrible oath that he won't die till he has killed you and Gideon, and got the poor blind girl back into his power. Look out for him, for he'll creep around till he does it."

This was delivered at broken intervals, and with much exertion, and as Dow ceased speaking, his head sank more heavily upon the knee that sustained it.

"Tell me, once more—do you know where Gideon and Helen have been carried?" asked Walter.

"No,—I do not. O, I'm all on fire!"

Walter raised the drooping head higher up, but it rested with a leaden weight upon his hands, and he could see that the eyes were turning up into the head. There was a hoarse gasping throe broke upon the cold air, the tory's hands fell heavily upon the ground, and the whole body sank, like a lump of lead, into quiet.

Walter Nixon raised the face nearer and gazed into the bloated features, but there were no marks of life there, and he let the head down upon the ground. He yet knelt by the corpse, when his ears caught the sound of a light foot-fall near him, and the rays of a light shot over the place.

The young man sprang quickly to his feet, and raised a pistol. Not more than a rod distant, he saw the dusky form of a man who held a dark lantern by his side, the light of which only served to make everything look more dark and gloomy about.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE HEART'S CONFESSION.

AS Walter Nixon noticed that the man began to approach, he exclaimed, "Who comes there?"

"Nobody that wants to hurt you," returned the new-comer. "Don't be in a hurry about shootin', for I've got a pistol as well as you."

Our hero was favorably struck by the sound of the stranger's voice, and instinctively he lowered the muzzle of his pistol.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"An' who are you?" was the laconic reply.

As the stranger came up he opened his lantern and held it up to the face of the young man.

"I guess you be Captain Nixon," he said, as he lowered the light.

"You guess rightly, then."

"Then I'm nobody but Luke Soper."

"Luke Soper!" exclaimed Walter, in tones of wild delight.

"Yes, sir."

"Let me grasp your hand. There, God bless you! I know you have saved the boy and his sister."

"I have, sir," returned Luke, in a tone of deep feeling. "They are where there can't be any harm come to 'em. But who is this?"

"Look, and see if you recognize him."

Luke held his lantern close down to the face of the dead man.

"It's Dow. You've finished him, capt'n."

"It's none of my work, Soper."

"None of your work?"

"No, Silas Ryan did it." And thereupon Walter related to him all that had transpired.

"Well," uttered Luke, as he once more held his lantern down to the face of Dow; "this is the last of Ryan's league, and it's fittin' that

he should die just as he did. I think it's the last. Mason must be dead."

"Yes, he is dead," said Walter. "He was shot on board my own vessel."

"I knowed it. Mason was the first, and Silas Ryan will be the last!"

Walter caught a deep meaning in the tones of his companion, but he chose to put no questions on the point, for there were other matters that had the precedence.

"Now tell me of Helen Ryan," he said.

"Where is she?"

"She's at the house of an old friend of mine, ten miles up the river."

"Then you must show me the way, for I must see her."

"That's just what I came for."

"Ha. How knew you I should be here?"

"I didn't know it; but Gideon said he thought you would, some evening this week. We knew your vessel was in port."

"When are you going to return?"

"Right away, if you'll go with me."

"Of course I will."

"But you won't be able to see Helen to-night, for she's almost sick, an' it'll be late when we get there; but you can sleep in the house, and then see her in the morning."

Walter considered upon the subject for several moments, and at length he resolved to wait until morning, for he feared that old Maynard might be uneasy about him. He communicated his thoughts to Luke, and the latter at once agreed to take the last ebb of the tide early in the morning and come down to the brick-yards, and take him back with the first flood.

The body of Dow was removed to the shed, and there Walter and Luke determined to leave it for Ryan to care for as best he might, and shortly afterwards they separated, the former in the path to the eastward, while the latter made his way directly to the river.

When our hero reached the dwelling of Jacob Maynard, he found the old man and his wife both up, and he noticed that they were

sad and downcast; but they grew cheerful as he entered, and ere long they began to converse with as much life and freedom as ever.

There was one thing that puzzled Walter not a little. Maynard showed himself to be a man of most excellent education, with a deep understanding, and a thorough knowledge of things about him in the world; and yet, at times, he would start forth into that rough, uncouth manner of expression that had characterized his conversation when they first met; but the young man gave no signs of having noticed it, though it made a deep impression upon his mind.

On the next morning Walter was up early, and having requested Maynard to go on board the brig during the forenoon and explain the cause of his absence, he set off for the brick-yards, where he found Luke Soper in waiting. The tide was just turning upon the flood, and the two men set off up the river at once, and before nine o'clock they landed near the Quaker's house.

Walter's heart fluttered in his bosom as he approached the dwelling, and when he entered he found the family at breakfast. Helen Ryan sat by the side of Mrs. Goodhue, at the head of the table, and as the sound of the coming foot-falls fell upon her delicate ear she started up from her chair, and an expression of ineffable joy overspread her beautiful features. But in a moment she seemed to remember that there were others about her, and she sank back into her chair, while a deep blush mounted to her cheeks and temples.

Gideon sprang forward and caught the young captain by the hand, and a tear of joy and gratitude beamed in his eye as he gazed into the face of our hero.

"This is Captain Nixon," said the boy, turning towards the old Quaker.

The old man extended a warm welcome to Walter, and gave both he and Luke seats at the table.

Once the young man opened his lips to speak



to Helen, but he feared to trust his tones, and he remained silent. He cast his eyes upon the sweet, pensive face that was half-turned towards him, and he thought he saw a pain-mark resting there. He answered the questions of the Quaker, and he could see that Helen seemed to hang upon the tones of his voice when he spoke. The conversation naturally turned upon the subject of the Revolution, and Simon Goodhue showed himself to be a noble-hearted patriot. He had given money and provisions to aid the young colonies in their growing struggle, and he stood ready to give the last farthing of his treasure to the same end.

After the breakfast things had been cleared away Walter was shown into another room. Simon Goodhue and Luke went down to the river to haul the boats up from the tide, the old lady was busy about her household affairs, and Gideon, without any apparent cause, took his hat and went out to the barn. Walter and Helen were left alone, and as yet neither of them had spoken to the other.

At length the young man arose from the chair he had occupied and seated himself by the side of the blind girl.

"Helen," he said, in a soft, musical voice, at the same time taking her hand, "are you glad that I have come?"

"Glad?" repeated the fair girl, while the joy-beams began to dance over her face. "Yes, O, yes. Are you not glad, too?"

"Yes, Helen, very glad. I should have been miserable had I not found you."

"Then you love me," murmured she.

"Love!" uttered Walter, starting at the sound of that word.

Helen turned towards her companion, and a strange look of fear had fallen upon her countenance.

"You do not misunderstand me, I hope?"

"No. I understand you well. I do love you."

"Then I am happy," she murmured, with a look of inexpressible gratitude. "For long years my heart has known no friend but my brother, and though his love has been a mine of

wealth to my yearning soul, yet I have longed for the love of some one older. Ah, I feared when you came here to-day that you had forgotten me."

"Forgotten you?" iterated Walter, who was completely rapt and puzzled by the girl's manner. There was something inexpressibly soft and sweet in the notes that dropped from her tongue, but the language seemed mystical.

"I thought you had forgotten me," because you did not speak to me," she answered. "I felt unhappy."

"Ah, Helen, you misunderstood me. The warmest sentiment of affection is sometimes spoken in silence."

"To you, Walter, it may be, but not to me. All silence is to me but dead, meaningless chaos. I know that sometimes my face declares the feelings of my heart, for I can feel the warm blood rush up there; and then, too, I feel that sorrow can speak in silence from my features; and I can smile when I am happy, just as I feel that I am smiling now; and I know that others can read all this, but it is a language shut out from me. The great book of Nature I cannot read in her majestic silence as you can. They tell me the earth is beautiful in summer-time, but I can scarcely dream of those joys which you can draw from the fount of vision. Nature moves me with awe, for I can hear her dread thunders and her howling tempests; and Nature gives me delight, for I hear her sweet birds sing and warble; and there are other pleasures, too, for I can smell the fragrance of the flowers, and the balm-laden atmosphere comes to me with a soothing, joy-giving power. But I know those who love me only when I hear them speak. You might frown upon me, and I should not know it. But you will not frown—you will love me—and I will try and always merit your love. I can be as grateful as those who are more fortunate than I am, even though I am almost helpless."

Walter Nixon gazed into the radiant features of Helen Ryan, and for some time he forgot that she was blind, for he smiled upon her as though he would make her feel happier for his

smiles. There was an eloquence of thought and expression in her language that charmed him, and the sympathy he had felt for her misfortune was almost lost in a deeper feeling. A heart like his knew no reason why purity and virtue should be of less value because associated with misfortune; and as he now gazed upon the lovely being, he could not but feel that the greatest source of domestic joy to him on earth would be to have such an object leaning upon his love, and looking to him for joy and counsel.

"I know you can be grateful, Helen," he said at length; "and I know of no higher joy that I could ask, than that you should always owe me your gratitude. You shall not want for a protector while I live."

"O, bless you, kind sir, bless you. And you will protect my brother, too?"

"Yes. He is a noble fellow. He shall not want while I have to give."

"Then he will be happy, too. O, sir, you know not how my brother loves you. We are orphans, now, and we have no home. You know that Silas Ryan is not our father?"

"Yes. Luke Soper told me this morning."

"Then perhaps, sir, if I live, you might sometime—"

The girl hesitated and hung down her head, and Walter could see that she looked troubled.

"What would you ask?" he said, raising up her head and drawing her nearer to him.

"You will not think me forward, sir?"

"No, Helen. Do not hold such a thought as that."

"Then, sir, sometime, perhaps, you will have a home of your own, and you would give me a home with you, where I could be happy and contented—some place where I could rest in peace, and know that I was loved. I should be happy then."

Walter Nixon pressed the fair hand he held more fondly in his own, and his heart beat with a warm and pure emotion.

"Helen," he said, almost in a whisper, "if I live you shall have such a home, and it shall be a bright and happy one."

"I shall not be altogether a burden to you.

There will be a thousand little things I can do. I can be with your children, and sing to them; and I can sew and knit; and you shall be a father to me, and love me as though I were your own child."

"A father?" uttered Walter, as the full meaning of his companion's speech flashed upon him.

"Yes, frankly and unsuspectingly returned Helen; "you will love me as a child, and then I can look up to you for counsel and advice."

"And in what can I advise you? in what counsel you?"

"In anything that will make me better and happier."

"And do you think I could lead you into a path more pure than that which you already tread?"

"Is not happiness conducive to purer thoughts and feelings?" asked the fair girl, with simple grace and expression. "Can one be so pure in all the impulses of the heart when that heart is crushed by wrong and oppression? Will there not be at times feelings and wishes— sudden risings of passionate despondency—which are not pure in the sight of God?"

"Perhaps you are right, Helen."

"I thank you," said the girl, with a glowing countenance. "And then there would be many things that you could teach me, that I do not know now—and knowledge leads to purity."

"And do you think you would then be happy to come and live with me?"

"Yes, O, yes."

"But suppose I could find some kind man who would take you now—who would love you and teach you—some one who is older and more experienced than I am? You would be happy then?"

"No, no."

"And why not?" asked Walter, as he keenly watched his companion's countenance.

"Because his voice would not be yours. It would not be you. It would not be the one who saved my life in the dark wood, and who was the first to teach me to know that others could love me than my brother."

"Helen," the young man spoke in a low,



soft whisper—"If I ever make me a home of my own I shall want you to come and live with me, but I cannot be a father to you."

"O, do not say that, sir."

"I speak truly, Helen."

"Then you cannot love me as I had hoped."

"Listen: There is a warmer, a tenderer love than that. There is a tie more strong."

Helen seemed for a moment trembling between doubt and fear, but her features soon grew calm, and she turned her face inquiringly towards her companion. She felt the breath that struck her cheek, and then there was a warm kiss imprinted upon her brow. She started beneath the magic touch, but she was not offended, nor was she frightened, for there was a happy smile broke over her features.

"Does not your own heart tell you my meaning?" Walter asked.

"O, I wish I could see your face," she murmured. "Perhaps I could read it there."

"If you could see it, you would read there the light of a pure and ardent love. I will be plain with you, Helen. I would make you a companion for life—I would make you my wife."

Helen Ryan reached forth the hand that was at liberty, and rested it upon the shoulder of her companion, and for several moments she remained silently in that position. There was no doubt, no fear, no trembling, upon her lovely features, but she seemed to be dwelling within the depths of her own heart. At length she spoke. It was in a calm, sweet tone:

"Would you make the poor blind girl your wife?"

"Yes, Helen, I would."

"And never murmur, never sorrow, nor feel unhappy, because her eyes were closed forever?"

"I could do nought but love her the more."

"Ah, I fear you know not your own heart. I could love you, and be as faithful as heaven itself, because I could owe you everything; but not so with you. You would owe me nothing, and I should be but a burden on your hands."

"Answer me this question, Helen! What could give you more exquisite pleasure than to

feel that you possessed the full gratitude of others? that you were the means of making others happy?"

"Nothing. That would be heaven."

"And that is the happiness I seek. I could love you the more because of your misfortune, and I could be the more tender because you would depend upon me almost entirely. A soul like mine will cling with a lasting love and affection about that which confidently reposes in trust beneath its care, and he who could even by a thought cast a shadow upon your path, would sink far below the level of manhood. I would still ask you to become my wife."

Now Helen trembled. A spark that had burned in her bosom now burst forth to a flame. She had not known how deep her own feelings had been till the present moment—she had not realized how her affections had been winding themselves about the image of him who had been the first to touch the cords of other than a sister's love in her soul. But she realized it now.

"Sometimes we will speak of this again," she murmured.

"Yes, we will speak of it often, but yet you can answer me now."

"Walter Nixon," said the beautiful girl, in a calm, frank tone; "I give myself to you, and you can do as your own heart shall dictate. If you should choose for yourself a life-companion more fortunate than myself, you would still give me a home; and I should be happy."

"And would you be so happy to feel that another claimed my tenderest care and love?" asked Walter, with a voice tuned to the deepest meaning. "Could you feel perfectly happy to know that you were only second in my affections—that my fondest words and holiest aspirations were not for you?"

"O, no, I should not be so happy. I know I should not; but I would not be envious—I would not complain. You have a right to take another for your wife."

"But I have no right to trample under foot the holy affections of my own heart, Helen. I have no right to blight the sweetest flowers that ever yet sprung up in my pathway. I should

lie to my own soul, should I take another than you for my wife, and I should lie to her to whom I should offer an empty heart. You must be my wife, sweet Helen."

"I cannot say nay. Do with me as you please; but O, raise not a hope so heavenly in my bosom that may be crushed."

"Fear not," said Walter, as he wound his arms about the fair being and pressed her to his bosom. "Let your hope rest in life, for death alone shall put out its torch."

"Ah, even death may not extinguish it, Walter; for if heaven be such a home as I have believed, where the freed spirit shall know the friends of earth, then our loves will be more beautiful than ever. O, Walter," continued the fair girl, her face glowing with holy enthusiasm; "I shall see in heaven—the scales will drop from my eyes, and I shall drink in the beauties of God's great universe. I shall see my father and my mother there, too. O, we shall know and love each other in heaven, else it would not be a home. Spirits must have form and substance, else they could have no life. If we know ourselves, then we shall know others, and if we do not know ourselves, then it would not be we who are raised from the dead. O, I cannot bear to be told of a love that death can destroy, for if it be a love worthy of a pure heart, then it must be an emanation from the spirit of God, to endure forever."

Walter gazed with wonder and awe into the upturned features of the being who had thus spoken, and in his soul he felt that he could sit ever by her side and listen to her sweet notes. He kissed her again, and she in turn wound her arms about his neck, and stamped upon his lips the same sweet token of love.

At that moment they heard the rustling of Mrs. Goodhue's tidy dress, and soon they were joined by the dame herself. Gideon soon afterwards came into the apartment, and so did Luke Soper; but Simon Goodhue came not.

"Where is our old friend?" asked Walter.

"He's gone away," returned the good dame.

"Then I shall not see him again. However, I suppose he had business."

"O, he may be back before you go, for of course you will stop and take dinner with us."

"Perhaps I may."

"Then you will see him again, and perhaps—"

Mrs. Goodhue stopped and looked at Luke. The latter shook his head in a meaning manner, and nothing more was said.

Walter's curiosity was excited, but he had too much good sense to ask any questions.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"THE LAST LINE IS BROKEN."

SIMON GOODHUE did return before dinner-time, and when he entered the house his face looked strangely. There was a mixture of hope and fear, of doubt and anxiety, upon his features, and for a long time after he took a seat he remained in deep meditation. At length he arose, and beckoned for Luke to follow him, and the two went forth to the barn, where they remained for some time.

"Mr. Goodhue," said Walter, as he drew the old Quaker one side after dinner, "you must pardon me if I seem over-curious, but yet I cannot avoid asking you if Gideon and Helen Ryan have any interest in the business you have been upon this forenoon?"

"Verily they have, friend Nixon."

"May I not ask the nature of it?"

"Thee may ask, certainly, but I would rather not answer thee now."

"You know not the deep interest I take in their welfare, friend Goodhue."

"Yes, I do, young man, for I heard Helen, only a few minutes ago, telling to her brother what thee had been saying to her. There, thee need not look troubled, friend Nixon, for thee has a noble heart, and thee hast shown it in thine offer to that sweet girl."

"Then if you know all, you cannot refuse to tell me of what may tend to the benefit of those two beings."

"Of course I cannot; but I can bid thee wait. I would not set thy heart upon the rack by telling thee of that which I have thought."

"You have placed my heart upon the rack already, friend Goodhue."

"No, no," returned the Quaker, with a meaning smile. "It was thine own curiosity did it. Now I ask thee, as a man, to wait."

Walter Nixon could ask no more, and though he tried hard to curb the strange curiosity that had beset him, and which gave him not a little uneasiness, yet he found it impossible.

Once more our hero pressed Helen to his bosom and kissed her. He told her he would come and see her as soon as his vessel again arrived in port, and he bade her be happy and contented, assuring her that Goodhue and Luke would protect her. He bade a kind adieu to Gideon, and the Quaker and his wife, and then he and Luke started for the river, it having been arranged that the latter should row him a piece up the river, and then return with the boat.

The tide was upon the ebb, but the wind blew strongly from the northeast, and it was with some difficulty that the boat was rowed. The wind setting against the tide caused an unusual commotion on the surface of the water, and the waves dashed over the light boat, sending the cold spray, with anything but a welcome sensation, over the half-benumbed oarsmen.

At a point nearly three miles above the brick-yards, Walter raised his oar from the water, and gazed along upon the shore.

"Is there not a good path from here to the old brick-yards?" he asked.

"Yes," returned Luke.

"Then let us put in here, and I will walk the rest of the way. I can do it easier and quicker."

Luke seemed pleased with the idea, and soon the boat was run up on the sand.

"I declare, I must bail her out," said Luke, as he gazed into the bottom of the boat, which was nearly a third full of water.

"It would be more agreeable, certainly; but what will you do it with?" returned Walter, noticing that there was no dipper on board.

"O, that's easy enough. I'll run up and

strip off a piece of birch bark. It'll be just the thing."

"Then I'll stay by the boat while you go."

"There's no need of that. She'll be safe enough. I shan't be gone but a minute."

As Soper spoke, he started up the bank and soon disappeared, but Walter remained by the boat, half through inclination, and half through a sort of instinctive prompting that had no palpable manifestation.

Not long had Luke been gone—not over three minutes—when the young man was startled by the report of a pistol, and in an instant more a second report broke upon his ear. He hesitated a moment, and then he darted up the bank. He could see by the bending of the bushes where Luke had gone, and he pushed his way in the same direction, and ere long he heard a noise, as though of a fierce struggle, accompanied by the rustling of dry leaves. Snatching a pistol from his pocket he hastened on, and upon reaching the spot from whence the sound proceeded, he found Luke Soper upon the ground, and with him, clutched in a powerful embrace, was a man whom Nixon at once recognized as Silas Ryan.

There was blood upon both of their bodies, and they had evidently both been wounded. They were writhing and twisting in fierce strength, each trying to get upon his knees and keep the other down. Walter would have fired, but he dared not, for fear he might shoot his own friend, and knowing not what course to pursue he stood for a moment a silent spectator of the scene. But he could not remain idle long. He knew the aims of Ryan, and he felt it to be his duty to interfere in behalf of Luke.

"Luke," he cried, leaping towards the spot; "throw me your knife. Where is it?"

The sound of that voice seemed to startle Silas Ryan, and he turned his head to see who had spoken. In an instant Luke saw his advantage, and disengaging his hand with a powerful effort he seized his adversary by the throat. Then, with one mighty heave, as he gathered all his strength for the trial, he turned the villain upon his back, and a moment more he was

uppermost with the right hand free. Walter saw a knife gleam suddenly in the light, and on the next instant Soper sprang to his feet, the wound he had received being but a very slight one on the thigh.

"There, Silas Ryan," he uttered, "you have made your own end. God knows 'twas no seeking of mine."

The villain started upon his elbow and glared wildly about him. There was a hot glow in his eyes as they rested upon Soper, and he vainly endeavored to reach the knife that was sheathed in his girdle. Soon, however, he placed his hand upon his left breast, from whence was pouring forth a purple stream, and as a deep groan of pain escaped him, he uttered:

"Luke Soper, you've killed me."

"You tried first to kill me, Silas Ryan."

Again the dying man made an abortive effort to reach the handle of his knife.

"O, I wish I could reach you now," he gasped, as the elbow that sustained him began to weaken.

"You can't, Silas Ryan. Your days on earth are numbered. You won't kill any more people."

"Kill! Ha, ha, ha—you killed them too, Luke Soper. You can't wash the blood from your hands. Don't you remember how they cried for mercy?"

"O, cease, cease!" groaned Soper, turning deadly pale, and quaking at every joint.

"Luke, Luke," whispered Ryan, looking vacantly up with eyes that had now become glassy; "where are those two children?"

"They are safe."

"Luke—remember your—kill them! kill them! Don't let them live. I swore that—Luke, Luke—"

Silas Ryan said no more, for with that last word the lamp of his life went out!

"He's dead!" said Walter, as he stepped nearer to the corpse.

Luke Soper made no answer, but silently he gazed upon the face of the man he had slain:

"Let us go from here now," continued our hero.

"No, no, wait a moment," said Luke.

As he spoke, he knelt down by the side of Ryan and tore open the shirt. Upon that blood-stained bosom, and suspended to the neck by a silken cord, was a golden locket, which Luke took in his hand and slipped from the string.

"What!" exclaimed Walter, "did that wretch still hold a spark of love in his bosom?"

"Love?" repeated Luke. "No. This he wore to keep alive his vengeance. He wore it because he hated the one it looked like. Whenever he saw it he used to curse and swear, and grit his teeth, and then he would be more ugly than ever. No, sir, he didn't know how to love."

"And who is it the picture of?"

"Helen's mother. Silas Ryan murdered her!"

"Let me look at it."

"Take it. You'll see it looks like Helen and Gideon both."

The locket contained the miniature of a beautiful female, in the bloom of youth. Walter took it in his hand.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as his eyes rested upon the picture; "do you speak truly when you say this is Helen's mother?"

"Yes. But what's the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"But there must be something. Did you know her?" asked Luke, gazing in astonishment upon the young man's working features.

"Know her?" repeated Walter, abstractedly. "Yes, Luke, yes. I must keep this for the present."

"Perhaps she was a friend of yours?"

"Yes, yes, she was."

"A relation?" slowly queried Luke.

"I must keep it."

"But you will give it to Helen. I took it for her, for though she can't see it, yet I know she would love to wear it next to her bosom."

"She shall have it, Luke. Come, let's go now. I will send some one from the town to dispose of this body."

Luke Soper cast one more look at the dead man, and then he turned away from the spot

where lay the last of the tory league. His thoughts were busy with the past, and Walter could see that there was a load of bitterness upon his soul, and that he was sad and grief-stricken.

At the river they separated, Luke jumping into the boat, without noticing the water it contained, while Walter took his way towards the brick-yards; having first, however, obtained from the former a promise that he would look well to the safety of Helen, and say nothing about the finding of the locket, as it would only serve to open her tender mind afresh to the misfortunes of the past.

It was nearly dusk when Walter reached the dwelling of Jacob Maynard, but the old man had gone on board the brig, and our hero learned from Mrs. Maynard that some news had been received at the port relating to the movements of the British. Walter hastened away, and having obtained a man to set him across the river, he made the best of his way to the town, whence he easily found a conveyance to his brig.

As he stepped upon the deck he was met by a stranger, wearing the same uniform with himself.

"Captain Nixon, I believe," said the stranger, stepping forward, and extending his hand.

"At your service, sir," returned Walter, eyeing with interest the noble countenance of his interlocutor.

"My name is Manly, sir—John Manly."

"A noble name for a noble man," uttered Nixon, as he shook the hand of the bold captain, who was one of the first to open the flag of America's infant navy to the sea-breeze.

"I bear you a letter of thanks, sir, from General Washington, and a more important commission than that which you now hold. There lays my vessel in the offing. Not quite so handsome a craft as yours, but she's a faithful one. We will go to your cabin, if you please."

Nixon led the way with a buoyant step, and he called for his officers to follow him. Manly had been sent to inform him that there were two heavy ships about to sail from Halifax loaded with military stores, and Washington had desired that the Lee (Manly's vessel) and the

Yankee Champion should cruise in company, and capture them if possible.

"My brig is ready at this moment," said Nixon, with a sparkling eye, as he finished the flattering letter of Washington, and passed it over to his officers. "You will take the weather gage, Captain Manly."

"I will, if you please."

"Of course. You are the oldest commander."

Shortly afterwards Manly went on board his own vessel, and in less than an hour the Yankee Champion was once more on her way out of the harbor, being just able to keep the channel on a taut bowline.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### CONCLUSION.

It was nearly a month before Walter Nixon again entered port, and then Captain Manly and himself carried two heavy ships into the harbor of Portsmouth. They were valuable prizes, and they had been captured without the loss of life. As soon as circumstances would permit he set sail for Newburyport, where he arrived the last day of December. The harbor was open up to the town, and just at nightfall the brig was warped up to one of the wharves, where she would be out of the way of any ice that might come floating down from further up the river.

Nixon left his vessel under the charge of Baker, and in company with Jacob Maynard he started for the residence of the latter. Mrs. Maynard was made once more happy—if a burst of joy can be called happiness—at seeing her husband, and she greeted the gallant young captain with enthusiasm. With a quick step she hastened about among the closets and cupboards, and soon had a substantial meal prepared for the new-comers.

After the table had been cleared away and set back, the trio gathered closer about the cheerful fire, and Maynard related to his wife the events of his last cruise. The good lady was warm in her joy at the success of the provincial vessels, and she even wished that she could fol-

low the fortunes of her husband against the invaders.

"What is the matter, captain?" asked Maynard, as he noticed that Nixon had remained long silent, and that he appeared to be lost to what was passing about him.

The young man started and gazed vacantly upon the old man, and then his eyes rested upon the dame.

"Do you remember the scene that passed between you and me a month ago in my cabin?"

"Yes," returned Maynard, while a look of gloom settled over his features.

"Well, it was upon that I was thinking. If you remember, we both had reason to be curious. Now I wish you to tell me the secret of the tears I saw you shed then, and of much of the strangeness I have seen in your manners since."

"It would do you no good to hear my story, and it would only pain me in its recital."

"Are you afraid to trust me, Maynard?"

"No, captain, I am not."

"Then I assure you it will do me much good to hear your story. And it may be a source of good to yourself."

"I see not how, captain."

"You have my assurance. Now trust me."

There was a strange light in Walter's countenance, and Maynard failed not to notice it. He turned an inquisitive look towards his wife.

"Tell him, Jacob," said she.

The old man's head sank upon his open palm, and it rested there for several moments. When he raised it he brushed a tear from his eye, and commenced:

"Years ago, captain, I was a happy, contented young man, and lived in Concord, only a few rods from the house where you were born. There was a lovely girl lived near me, and I loved her and asked her to be my wife. She consented. In the same neighborhood there lived a reckless, dissipated fellow who also professed to love the girl that had promised to be mine. When he found that she had become affianced to me, he swore by the most terrible oaths that we should never be married. He

was then following the sea, and before he went on his next voyage, he saw the girl and called on heaven to witness his words while he swore that if she married me her life should be made one of gall and bitterness. After he had gone we were married, and for three years we heard nothing more from him. During that time we had a daughter and a son, and even then the villain's oath seemed to have taken effect, for when our darling Helen was two years of age, she was stricken with utter blindness, but we loved her the more for that. Our boy was yet an infant when our enemy returned, and for several weeks he lurked about the place without manifesting any open hostility. At length, however, he came to my house one day when I was away, and grossly insulted my wife. She spit upon him and spurned him. He seemed to be actuated by the spirit of a demon, for he would have killed her then had not I returned while he was yet there. My wife flew to my arms, and told me what had transpired. Do not let this affect you so, Susan."

"Go on, Jacob, I cannot help it," said she.

"Well, sir, you can imagine what must have been my feelings at that moment. I had a heavy staff in my hand, and I knocked the fellow down, and then kicked him from the house. That night my dwelling was entered by the villain, and he had an accomplice with him who seemed to have come only to keep watch. I heard—it was after midnight—a sharp cry from my little daughter, who during the warm weather, slept in a little room adjoining our own, and hastily slipping from my bed I ran to see what was the matter. At the door I was met by a man who struck me with a knife. I grappled with the assassin, and on the same instant I saw my enemy dart past me towards the bed where lay my wife, and by the bright moonbeams I could see that he had a knife in his hand. O, I cannot describe the bloody scene that followed! Suffice it for me to say that we were left for dead, and when we returned to consciousness it was broad daylight, and we were surrounded by our neighbors; but our children—our sweet girl and our innocent in-

fant—were not to be found! The town was in arms, and scouting parties were sent in all directions, but all to no effect. Blood was found about the house, and in all probability our sweet innocents were murdered and their bodies hidden. Since then life has been almost a burden to both me and my wife. We staid in our native town but a short time after the fearful event, and then went to New York. There I plunged into the excitement of maritime business, and I made money. A few years ago I came to this place. The brick-yards were for sale, and as it was a retired spot, where none ever passed except on business at the yards, I took it. My workmen were uneducated, free-hearted men, and at length I became so used to their mode of thought and expression that I became almost like them in my manners. When you fitted out your brig I longed for the excitement the opportunity afforded. I had not forgotten the seamanship of my younger days, and I had brushed it up some while running out of New York. The rest you know. Is it not fearful?"

"What was the name of the villain who tried to murder you?" asked Walter.

"Silas Ryan," returned Maynard, with a fearful shudder, and then, as he wiped his eyes, he continued: "You have heard it now. Do you think the recital has benefited you?"

"It has at least satisfied me on one point," said Walter. "You are the same man of whom I have heard my father speak, and most of your story I heard when I was a boy."

"Then I trust your satisfaction is complete?"

"Not yet, Jacob Maynard. Not yet. I have not wrenched your heart-strings from the promptings of mere curiosity. I have something in my possession which I found a month ago. Look upon your wife, Maynard, and say if she does not still hold much of the beauty of her youth?"

"She does, captain."

"And here is youth itself!" said Walter, as he drew forth the miniature and handed it to his companion.

The old man's eyes fell upon the sweet face

that smiled from that ivory surface, and starting wildly from his seat he clutched the golden locket in his grasp.

"This—this—was taken from me on that fearful night," he articulated. "Where, where did you find it?"

"It was taken from the stiff, cold corse of Silas Ryan!"

"And did you know him?" uttered Maynard, who seemed—if the term may so be used—to have sunk into a powerless frenzy.

"Yes."

"Where—O, where?"

"He has lived for years not more than five miles from this spot."

"O, heavens! and I never knew it. But then he's dead now, and I'll cherish revenge no longer."

Susan Maynard only wept more bitterly as she gazed upon the locket, and when she gave it back to her husband she had no power to speak.

"I will keep this," murmured Jacob.

"Not now," said Walter. "I have promised to give it to another."

The old man looked at the young captain in blank wonder.

"Who else on earth can claim it?" he cried.

"Could you bear to hear it?"

Jacob Maynard started as a lightning-flash of thought whirled wildly through his brain. He stepped forward and laid his hand softly upon Walter's shoulder, and in a low whisper he said: "*Speak!*"

"Then," returned Walter, "I have promised to give it to one who would cherish it as the counterfeit of her mother. Her sightless eyes may never behold its sweetness, but her heart would beat fondly to feel that the loved image was near her. Another, too—a fair-haired youth—will grasp it—"

Ere Walter could finish, a wild cry broke from the lips of Susan Maynard, and starting up from her chair she would have rushed to her husband, but her strength failed her, and she sank upon the floor. Jacob and Walter both sprang to her assistance, and having lifted her into a chair, she soon opened her eyes.

"Did I dream?" she murmured, gazing for a moment vacantly about. Then her eyes were fastened upon Walter. "It was you who spoke," she cried, starting up and seizing the young man by the arm. "Tell me, sir, O, do tell me, do my children live?"

"A month ago I left them well and happy. They are but a few miles from here, with one who will protect them. In the morning we will go to them."

Susan Maynard let go the arm of Walter and tottered towards her husband, and as her head fell upon his bosom he wound his arms about her, and, speechless and frantically, they wept till their tears formed a stream that might have watered the joy-plants of heaven.

Scene by scene did Walter Nixon tell to the old man and his wife all that he knew of their sweet children, and when he had closed there was more weeping and more thanksgiving.

On the next morning, Jacob Maynard had his sledge early at the door, and into it stepped the old man, his wife, and Walter. The ice upon the river was solid enough for heavy travelling, and they took that smooth, frozen track. The horse was a powerful one, and as he sprang onward in his course he seemed almost conscious of the happy mission he was thus aiding. No words were spoken until they reached the Quaker's dwelling. Walter requested Jacob and his wife to remain in the sledge till he had first gone in and prepared the way.

The young man's summons at the door was answered by the old Quaker himself. Good-hue would have spoken to those who sat in the sledge, but a look from Walter kept him silent.

"Is Helen well?" the young man asked.

"Yes. You shall see for yourself," and as the Quaker spoke, he led the way to the room where sat the good dame, Helen, Gideon, and Luke Soper.

Walter cast his eyes upon Helen. How wonderfully had she altered in one short month! The bloom of ruddy health was upon her cheek, and ———. What a sensation was that!

Helen arose from her seat and turned her beaming face upon our hero.

"Don't speak, sir," she uttered, as she bent eagerly, wistfully forward. "Don't let me hear your voice. Don't move, for I should know your step. O, my eyes do not deceive me! 'Tis Walter!"

She smiled a sweet, enrapturing smile as she spoke, and Walter Nixon on the next moment held her fair form within his arms. She gazed up into his face, and her eyes sparkled and danced in a flood of liquid light, and Walter saw his own image reflected from their lustrous depths. He had not yet spoken.

"You are Walter, O, I know you are."

"Yes, my own dear Helen, I am thy Walter."

"O, I knew it, for I can see your face. Walter, I can see! I can see!"

Walter Nixon would have spoken, but at this moment the door was burst open, and Jacob Maynard and his wife entered. They had not been able to wait longer. Their parents' hearts were on the rack.

"Where are my children, O, where?" wildly cried the mother, as she gazed about her.

"Helen," whispered Walter, "look upon that woman. Does your soul hold her image yet?"

The fair girl turned her eyes upon the new-comer, and the fond image she had cherished for years in her heart's memory stood before her a living reality. The magic word that had so long dwelt in her soul's tablets fell tremblingly from her lips—the mother caught it, and hope was anchored in the blest haven of full fruition. The father and the mother, the son and the daughter, were once more dwelling in the embrace of such a love as makes angels happy.

Who shall attempt to drag forth the human heart and paint all its raptures! Those only who can feel such love, and whose own souls can give home to such perfect bliss, can ever know them. Words cannot copy a Madonna, nor can they paint the human heart!

"You told me she was yet blind," said Jacob Maynard, as he still held his son and daughter to his bosom.

"So she was when the young man last saw her," said the Quaker, before Walter could answer. "But she's blind no longer. A man



well skilled in such matters lives not far from here, and I got him to see the girl. It was but a thick film that had grown over the eyes, and he dexterously removed it. That, friend Nixon, was the errand I had been upon on the day that thee was so inquisitive. The doctor knew not then that he could remove the difficulty, and I would not raise thy hopes without good cause."

Luke Soper had during this time been in the back ground, but his emotions were far from uninteresting. He had fallen upon his knees and clasped his hands towards heaven, and he thanked God that he was not a murderer! He confessed that he was the man who had accompanied Silas Ryan on the night that Maynard and his wife were to have been murdered, and that it was he who first struck the former. Ryan had made him believe that the woman was his own wife, and that the children were his, and that Maynard had seduced them away from him; and then, partly by threats and partly by promises, he had been induced to assist in the foul deed. It was several years before Luke learned the deception that had been practised upon him, and then his heart smote him; but he had dipped his hand in blood, and Silas Ryan held him by the strong chain of guilt. At length he had feared that Ryan might murder him, for he had determined to protect the children from further wrong, and so he came to Simon Goodhue and confessed the whole; making the old Quaker promise that he would keep the secret, and, in case Ryan should kill him (Luke), that he would expose the villain and secure the children.

Luke Soper's deep contrition, and the unswerving faithfulness with which he had watched over the children, were ample reasons for his forgiveness, and he was blessed.

"Now, Jacob Maynard," said Nixon, "I will give you the miniature, but in return you shall give me this," taking Helen's hand.

The old father and mother were too happy to speak, but when they saw the soft love-light that beamed in the eyes of their daughter, they knew that her own happiness was locked up in the keeping of him who had so truly brought

about the present hour of bliss, and they gave their beautiful child into the keeping and care of Walter Nixon forever. Darkness could surround her no more, and our hero was forced to admit that he could love her none the less now that she was no longer blind.

Years rolled on, and the YANKEE CHAMPION still proudly bore her flag to the breeze. She struck terror to the foreign foe, and her batteries thundered over many a capture of the enemy.

It was a beautiful day in April. Upon the banks of the Merrimaek stood a noble dwelling, and beneath the piazza sat an old man and woman, and a lovely female who was laughing and playing with two curly-headed children that gambolled at her feet. Suddenly the tramp of horses broke upon the air, and soon two men, the older dressed in the uniform of a naval captain, and the other as a lieutenant, rode up to the steps and leaped from their saddles. The former sprang towards the female who played with the children, and clasped her to his bosom.

"Helen, Helen, my own sweet wife," he exclaimed; "I am back again once more. And my children, O, bliss!"

Walter Nixon raised his children in his arms, and as he fondly kissed them, the young and happy wife went to meet her brother, for Gideon, too, had returned from the performance of the noble patriot's duty, to find a warm welcome to the bosoms of his aged parents and his sister.

"O, Walter," uttered the fond wife, as she clung about her husband's neck, "must you leave me again?"

"No, no, sweet Helen, I shall go from your side no more. The sword I received from the hands of my dying father has done its duty, and God grant that henceforth and forever it may rest honorably in its scabbard. Father, mother, wife," he continued, while a halo of holy joy lit up his noble features, "open wide your hearts and give praise to God. The foe have been conquered! England has drawn back her trembling foot from our soil! The rattle of musketry and the roar of cannons have ceased! A million hearts are shouting the glorious psalm—AMERICA IS FREE!"

THE END.