

REQUIRED READING, S. S. R. U.

STORIES FROM CANADIAN HISTORY.

BY THE EDITOR.*

A BRAVE WOMAN'S EXPLOIT.

NEVILLE TRUEMAN found ample occupation in ministering to the sick and wounded, and in visiting his scattered flock throughout the invaded territory. He was enabled, incidentally, to render important service to his adopted country. It was toward the end of June, that one afternoon he was riding through the forest in the neighbourhood of the Beaver Dams, near the Town of Thorold,—a place which received its name from the remarkable constructions of the industrious animal which has been adopted as the national emblem of Upper Canada,—where there was a small force of British troops posted. In the twilight he observed a travel-worn woman approaching upon the forest pathway, with an air of bodily weariness, yet of mental alertness and anxiety. As she drew near, he recognized a worthy Canadian matron, whom he had, more than once, seen in his congregation in the school-house at the village of Chippewa.

"Why, Mrs. Secord!" he exclaimed, reining up his horse as she attempted to pass him, furtively trying to conceal her face, "are not you afraid to be so far from home on foot, when the country is so disturbed?"

"Thank God it is you, Mr. Trueman!" she eagerly replied. "I was afraid it might be one of the American scouts. 'Home,' did you say? I have no home," she added in a tone of bitterness.

"Can't I be of some service to you? Where is your husband?" Neville asked, wondering at her distraught air.

"Havon't you heard?" she replied. "He was sore wounded at Queenston Heights, and will never be a well man again; and our house was pillaged and burned. But we're wasting time; what reck my private wrongs when the country is overrun by the King's enemies? How far is it to the camp?"

"Farther than you can walk without resting," he answered. "You seem almost worn out."

"Nineteen miles I've walked this day, through woods and thicket, without bit or sup, to warn the King's troops of their danger."

"What danger?" asked Neville, wondering if her grief had not somewhat affected her mind.

"The enemy are on the move—hundreds of them—with cannon and horses. I saw them marching past my cottage this very morning, and I vowed to warn the King's soldiers or die in the attempt. I slipped unseen into the woods and ran like a deer, through bypaths and cross lots, and I must press on or I may be too late."

Not for a moment did this American-born youth hesitate as to his duty to his adopted country. Wheeling his horse he exclaimed, "You brave woman, you've nobly done your part, let me take you to the nearest house

and then ride on and give the alarm." "I hoped to have done it myself," she said. "But it is best as it is. Never mind me. Every minute is precious."

Without waiting for more words, Neville waved his hand in encouragement, and putting spurs to his horse was out of sight in a moment. In a few minutes he galloped up to the post held by the British picket, and flung himself off his reeking steed—incurring imminent risk of being bayoneted by the sentry, because he took no notice of his peremptory challenge. Bursting into the guard-room, he called for the officer of the day, Lieutenant Fitzgibbon. A few words conveyed the startling intelligence—the alarm was promptly given—the bugle sounded the "turn out"—the guard promptly responded—the men rushed to arms. Messengers were despatched to an outpost where Captain Ker was posted with two hundred Indians, and to Major de Heron, commanding a body of troops in the rear.

Neville, followed by two files of soldiers, returned to meet the brave Canadian matron to whose patriotic heroism was due the rescue of the little post from an unexpected attack by an overwhelming force. They found her almost fainting from fatigue and the reaction from the overstrung tension of her nerves. Leaping from his horse, Neville adjusted his cloak so as to make a temporary side-saddle, and placed the travel-worn woman thereon. Walking by her side, he held the bridle-rein and carefully guided the horse over the rugged forest path, the two soldiers falling behind as a rear-guard. As they approached the post at Beaver Dams, the red-coats gave a hearty British cheer. The guard turned out, and presented arms as though she were the Queen; and the gallant Lieutenant Fitzgibbon assisted the lady to alight with as dignified a courtesy as he could use to royalty itself. She was committed to the care of the good wife of the farm-house which formed the head-quarters of the post, and every means taken to ensure her comfort. By such heroism as this did the stout-hearted Canadian women of those stern war times serve their country at the risk of their lives.

Vigorous efforts were now made for defence. Trees were hastily felled to blockade the road. A breastwork of logs was thrown up at a commanding position, in front of which was an abatis of young trees and brush piled up to obstruct approach. Lieutenant Fitzgibbon had only some forty-three regulars and two hundred Indians, to oppose a force of nearly six hundred men, including fifty cavalry and two field-pieces. He must effect by stratagem what he could not effect by force. Every man who could sound a bugle, and for whom a bugle could be found, was sent into the woods, and these were posted at considerable distances apart. The Indians and thirty-four red-coats, concealed behind trees, lined the road. Before long was heard the tramp of cavalry and rumble of the field-guns. As they came within range the buglers, with all the vigour in their power, sounded a charge, the shrill notes ringing through the leafy forest aisles. The Indians yelled their fearful war-whoop, and the soldiers gave a gallant cheer and opened a sharp fire.

The ruse was as successful as that of Gideon and his three hundred men with their trumpets and pitchers, in the wars of the Philistines. After a spirited attack, the advanced guard fell back upon the main body of the enemy, which was thrown into confusion. Some of the cavalry horses were wounded, and dashed wildly through the ranks, increasing the disorder. The artillery horses caught the infection, and, plunging wildly, overturned one of the gun-carriages in the ditch. At this moment a body of twenty Canadian militia arrived, and Fitzgibbon, to carry out his ruse of affected superiority of numbers, boldly demanded the surrender of the enemy. Colonel Boerstler, the American commander, thinking the British must be strongly supported, to Lieutenant Fitzgibbon's astonishment consented. The latter did not know what to do with his prisoners, who were twice as many as his own force, including the Indians. The opportune arrival of Major de Heron and Captain Villiers, with two hundred men, furnished a sufficient force to guard the prisoners. The chagrin of the latter, on hearing of their deception and capture by a handful of red-coats and red-skins, was intense. The name of the heroic Canadian wife, Mrs. Laura Secord, to whose timely information this brilliant and bloodless victory was due, was honourably mentioned in the military despatches of the day; and her memory should be a perpetual inspiration to patriotic daring to every son and daughter of Canada.*

This event was one of the turning points of the campaign. Dearborn, whose forces were wasted away by disease, famine, and the fortunes of war, to about four thousand men, was beleaguered in Fort George by Vincent with less than half the number of troops. The British now assumed the offensive, and on the morning of the American national anniversary, the fourth of July, a small force of Canadian militia, under Colonel Clark, crossed at daybreak from Chippewa to Fort Schlosser, captured the guard, and carried off a large quantity of provisions and ammunition, of which they were much in need.

A week later, Colonel Bishopp, with two hundred and forty regulars and militia, crossed before day from Fort Erie to the important American post of Black Rock. The enemy were completely taken by surprise, and the block-houses, barracks, dockyard, and one vessel, were destroyed; and seven guns, two hundred stand of arms, and a large quantity of provisions captured.

One day, about the middle of July, a dust-begrimed, sunburnt, yet soldierly-looking young fellow, notwithstanding the weather-stained and faded appearance of his dragoon uniform, rode up to The Holms. He cantered familiarly up the lane and, throwing the reins on the neck of his horse, which proceeded of its own accord to the stable, entered, without knocking, the house.

Kate was in the dairy, moulding the

* A portrait of Mrs. Secord, as a venerable old lady of ninety-two, in a widow's cap and weeds, is given in *Lossing's Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812*, page 621; also her autograph and a letter describing her exploit. The Prince of Wales, after his return from Canada in 1860, caused the sum of £100 sterling to be presented her for her patriotic service. Lieutenant Fitzgibbon was made a Knight of Windsor Castle.

golden nuggets of butter with a wooden spatula. Stealing up on tip-toe, our dragoon threw his arms around the girl and gave her a hearty kiss, whose report was as loud as the smack which he instantly received on his cheek from the open palm of the astonished Katharine.

"A pretty reception you give your brother," exclaimed the young man.

"Why, Zenas!" cried Katharine, throwing her arms around him, and giving him a kiss that more than made amends for the slap, "how you frightened me; you naughty boy. I thought it was one of those Ynnkee soldiers. They often come begging for cream or cherries, and get more impudent every day."

"They won't come again, very soon," said Zenas, with all his old assurance. "We will lock them up safe enough in Fort George, and soon drive them back to their own side of the river. But give us something to eat. I'm hungry as a wolf. Where's father?"

"In the ten-acre wheat field. He has to work too hard for his years, and can get no help for love or money," answered Kate, as she set before her brother on the great kitchen table a loaf of homemade bread, a pat of golden butter, a pitcher of rich cream, and a heaped platter of fragrant strawberries just brought in from the garden.

"Didn't I say I'd be back to get in the wheat? And you see I've kept my word," said the lad. "This is better than camp fare," he went on, as the strawberries and cream rapidly disappeared with the bread and butter. "I have a message for you, Kate. Who do you suppose it is from?" said the rather raw youth, with a look that was intended to be very knowing.

"If it's from the camp," replied Kate, calmly, "I know no one there except Captain Villiers and Mr. Trueman. Is it from either of them?"

"Trueman is a first-rate fellow—a regular brick, you know, even if he is a preacher. You ought to have seen how he stood up for them Yankee prisoners, and got our fellows to share their rations with them, although he had helped to bag the game himself. But the message is not from him, but from the captain. He says you saved his life twice,—once nursing him when he was sick, and once by keeping those Yankee scouts here while we got away. We heard all about your adventures. Well, he's gone to help Proctor in Michigan, and might never come back, he said, and he asked me would I give you this, in case he fell, to show that he was not ungrateful; but I had better give it to you now, or I will be sure to lose it. I can't carry such trumpery in my saddle-bags;" and he handed his sister a small jewel-case. Katharine opened it, and saw an elegant cross, set with gems, lying on a purple velvet cushion.

"He said his mother gave it to him when he was leaving home," continued Zenas. "She was kind of High Church, I guess, and they're most the same as Catholics. He said he had a sort of presentiment that he'd get killed in the war, and he didn't want some wild Indian to snatch it from his body with his scalp, and give to his dusky squaw."

Kate stood looking at the jewel, and knitting her brows in thought. At length she said, "I'll keep it for him

* This sketch is taken from a volume by the Editor, entitled, "Neville Trueman, the Pioneer Preacher—a story of the War of 1812," pp. 244, price 75 cents. Wm. Briggs, Toronto, Publisher.