

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. HADLIER

BOOK II

CHAPTER XI

AN EAVESDROPPER CAUGHT

Growing impatient out there in the bleak coldness of the night, Mynheer went cautiously over to the window and for a single instant peered into the room. He saw that, once all the other guests had gone, the two young men had bent their heads together. The astute observer felt assured that something of unusual importance was under discussion. He wondered if it could be about the de Lacey's, and he was more than ever resolved to find out. His curiosity whetted, he resumed his position on the other side of the great tree and waited.

It seemed a long time, but he was at last rewarded by seeing the young officer and his companion come forth, still in close conversation, while the smuggler remained within. Mynheer did not venture to move until he had seen them turn a corner and vanish from sight. Then he stole cautiously to the door and entered. Greatbatch, who had been patronizing the rum quite steadily all the evening, was now in a drowsy state. His head had fallen forward on his breast, and he snored loudly. Mynheer gave an order for Ned Negus as an excuse for his return, and mine host, with a furtive glance at the clock, went off unwillingly to execute the commission. The merchant laid his hand heavily on the shoulder of the sleeper. Greatbatch started, and shook himself as nearly awake as his tipsy condition permitted. He did not recognize Mynheer, but continued the conversation as though the young men were still present.

"I can tell you, gentles, that the risks are great, and if the 'Hesperia' has never shown her heels to a foe, she puts herself in danger this time."

He showed a disposition to fall asleep again, and Mynheer, without speaking lest the sound of his voice should cause him to realize his mistake, gently prodded him to go on. "It's all very well for you, Cap'n Williams, if your heart's set on carryin' off the girl, as you asked me to do before. But if I take her off the sloop, you'll be a Papist, or no Papist, it's your that's to be responsible, and so I tells you. And, if Mynheer Laurens is to back me against loss, let him put down the money."

He dozed off again, waking with a start at the touch of Mynheer's hand on his shoulder.

"Have it your own way, gentles, next Friday afternoon, by four o'clock, off Sandy Hook."

The man continued to mutter, but his talk became more and more incoherent and he showed a disposition to fall off asleep. As mine host was due at any moment with the hot negus, and as it was already past the usual hour for the tavern to close, Mynheer sat down close by the tipsy man, and bent himself eagerly to the task of eliciting some further bits of information about what he now saw was a concerted plot to carry off a girl from a sloop. In his mind all the probabilities indicated that the girl in question was no other than Mistress de Lacey. He was so intent in the endeavor to make Greatbatch speak intelligibly, and so little apprehensive of the danger of interruption at that time of the night, that he took no precautions and never perceived that the door had been softly opened to admit a tall man wrapped in a cloak. A hand was presently laid on his shoulder, and, starting violently, he found himself confronted by Captain Prosser Williams. The expression on the latter's face was menacing in the extreme, for he had caught Mynheer in the act of putting questions to Greatbatch, which showed that he had learned much if not all of the carefully concerted plan. It was fear of what the smuggler might reveal to any chance comer that had brought Captain Prosser Williams back, though he pretended it was to seek a lost gauntlet. Paler than ever with rage, he now stood eyeing Mynheer, who rose slowly to his feet and confronted him. In the breast of the latter were all sorts of conflicting emotions, in which predominated fear of Captain Prosser Williams. Not indeed physical fear, but the apprehension of what revenge he might take, for this might be of such a nature as to interfere with many of his own schemes and seriously impair that fabric of social position, the surface popularity which he had built up, and the good understanding which he had been at pains to cultivate with the Household of Lord Bellomont. In those instants that elapsed, while the two stood confronting each other and the stillness of the tavern room was broken only by the snoring of Greatbatch, Mynheer was chiefly occupied with devising some means of escape from his mortifying and dangerous position, and thus gave but little thought to the girl whose safety was imperilled. It was Prosser Williams who broke silence, in a voice scarcely articulate owing to the fury which was consuming him.

"Mynheer de Vries," he said in a menacing tone, "I find you here spying, in a most unwarrantable and contemptible fashion, into what does not concern you, and striving to extract information from a drunken man."

For once Mynheer's aplomb completely deserted him, and he strove to stammer out some excuse. The other, without heeding him, went on.

"Since you have forced yourself into this matter—to what extent I know not, since I cannot be aware of how much or how little this drunken brute has revealed—I will charge you with responsibility for any failure of these plans which are for the good of all concerned. I demand, therefore, your promise of secrecy."

"And if I refuse?" Mynheer said slowly, for his manhood was striving to reassert itself.

A wave of pity swept over him for the misfortunes of the girl, who had been so lately but a charming young maid busy in her flower-garden. "If you refuse," echoed Prosser Williams, and there was an ugly look in the pale eyes. "If you refuse, I shall ruin you, that is all. You must give me your oath to repeat no word of what you may have heard or surmised, nor in any other way take advantage of what you have learned."

Still Mynheer hesitated, for the forces of good and evil, which he had striven to hold so nicely balanced, now contended within him. He was tempted to throw discretion to the winds and defy Prosser Williams, whose influence might be less great than was popularly supposed, and against whom in turn Mynheer might use strong weapons. But the habitual caution of a life prevailed. He was sorry for the girl, but no sentiment toward her and her father was not sufficiently robust to balance the risk that would run by antagonizing this powerful member of His Excellency's Household.

"You are slow in making up your mind," said the young officer with a sneer, "but Mynheer de Vries has been too long engaged in the exercise popularly known as 'jumping whichever way the cat jumps,' not to do so now."

Mynheer's face flushed with an anger to which he dared not give expression, and Prosser Williams, who read something of what was passing in his companion's mind, assumed a more bullying tone.

"You may give your word or keep it," he cried, "for I know full well that, since I have caught you spying and striving to make a drunkard talk in the hope of being able to turn the information thus gained to your own mean and contemptible ends, you will be afraid to use that knowledge."

"Though your language is insulting and ungentlemanly to a degree," Mynheer said, with an attempt at dignity, "I will freely give you the promise you demand, for I feel assured that I may safely leave the matter in your hands, since it is not, as I feared, solely in those of this disreputable seaman."

Captain Prosser Williams, looking the speaker full in the face, burst into an insolent laugh. "Call him by his name, a smuggler and a pirate, who has oftentimes drawn your chests out of the fire," he said mockingly. "As for your word, I will take it in default of better security, since it is at your grievous peril you will break it. And now to set this drunken animal upon his homeward way before his tongue do further mischief."

He roused Greatbatch with no gentle hand from his slumbers, and with mine host's assistance raised him to a standing posture, not without angry growls and sullen protests from the sleeper. Once on his feet, however, the smuggler shook himself together, and went off with unsteady gait in the direction of his lodgings near the wharf. Captain Prosser Williams, as he too prepared to depart, threw back from the door at Mynheer a good-night full of such mocking politeness that the merchant's face was tinged with red.

"My best wishes, too," he sneered, "for a close tongue which will keep you out of mischief."

worse than that of many men who stood high in the colony. Consequently, whatever guilt he had incurred did not weigh upon his soul, for he was pre-eminently a conventionalist. But to connive, however indirectly, at the abduction of a young girl whom he had long known and admired, and at the arrest of her father, was another matter altogether, and one which, if it ever became publicly known, would expose him to the condemnation of a large section of his fellow-townsmen.

As he stumbled along in the darkness the struggle in his mind was intense and painful. He tried to reassure himself with such specious arguments as men very commonly put forth to screen their faults. Captain Prosser Williams had declared that the scheme he had in view would reward the good of all concerned. But reason and common sense alike told him that that officer's injunctions to secrecy, the expression of his face and what he knew of his character, belied his statement. When Mynheer reached home, he was surprised to see his wife still in her chair in the drawing room. Also, after her own dull fashion, she appeared to be in radiant good humor. Her mood jarred upon him, though he was far indeed from guessing its cause. He answered her shortly, and was utterly disinclined for conversation. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself and his own course of action, though he argued that he had no alternative but absolute ruin. He knew that he acted like Pilate, who would have saved the innocent if he could have done so without sacrificing his own prospects.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAGEDY OF SANDY HOOK

The sloop "Anna Maria," having on board Mr. de Lacey and Evelyn, arrived duly at Sandy Hook, and there lay to in waiting for the "Mermaid," which was to receive on board her two passengers. Of the events which afterwards transpired, various accounts were given, and it was only the chief participants who were aware of all the circumstances. One thing became known for certain in Manhattan, that the sloop was overhauled by the brigantine "Hesperia," commanded by Greatbatch, and that with him were Captain Prosser Williams and Henricus Laurens, two zealous champions of the Protestant cause. The latter had obtained special powers, which gave the sanction of the law to whatever was done, and protected the skipper of the piratical craft from any injurious consequences. Mynheer Laurens, besides his motives which have been already mentioned, was actuated by a burning desire to distinguish himself in the eyes of Lord Bellomont, and through him in those of the King's Majesty, as an ardent supporter of the Protestant succession.

Though Captain Prosser Williams was not unwilling to be placed in the same category, he had nevertheless undertaken on personal grounds an expedition in which he felt himself perfectly safe. He laughed long, though not loud, as he paced the deck of the "Hesperia." For he was in high spirits at the approaching success of his schemes. "Since His Ex.," he jests, "is so desirous of hanging Jesuits, or any others of the black coated gentry that he can catch, as to offer high rewards to the savages for their capture, he will of a surety be glad, when I have told all I know, to lay his hand upon this girl, who has kept alive the Romish superstition in these dirty brutes of Wilden, and upon her father who is a prize worth bagging."

Then he fell to thinking, with curious consistency of Evelyn and of those charms by which she had subjugated this hardened and cynical heart. As he leaned over the side of the vessel, as it lay close to the "Anna Maria," the figure of the girl and those eyes of hers, so different in expression from all other eyes, seemed to beckon him on. He could scarcely avoid the result of the attack by Greatbatch, which was to put the sloop and its passengers in their power. For he had an alternative in his mind, more daring, more fraught with peril and more delectable than that of conveying Evelyn a prisoner to New York. This was to persuade Greatbatch to sail away for foreign ports with the coveted prize. He had inveigled on board of the piratical craft a young clergyman, attached to an English church, under the pretext of taking a pleasant sail down the Bay. The latter, who was not without social ambitions, was flattered by the notice of the brilliant young officer of His Excellency's staff, and readily responded to the invitation. Prosser Williams felt that Evelyn must sooner or later yield to his importunities, after which he would be enabled to arrange matters with Lord Bellomont, who had some respect for the young officer's influential relations in England. The autumn afternoon was darkening to night; rough weather was pressed, the crew of the waves showed white, the sea gulls flew low, and the boats of the oyster fishers were making shorewards in haste. Prosser Williams felt his heart beat high, and his imagination was excited by the thought of how infinitely preferable would be his own particular scheme than to await the tedious and sordid process of law. He felt quite noble and virtuous that he was prepared to sacrifice, or run the risk of sacrificing, his prospects in England by a marriage with this obscure girl. He had almost persuaded him-

self that, like a hero of romance, he was hastening to her rescue, when his thoughts were interrupted by the appearance at his side of Henricus Laurens, who reminded him that it was time they appeared on board the sloop to give an appearance of legality to what Greatbatch had already done there, and to arrest father and daughter formally in the name of the law.

Prosser Williams received the reminder coldly. He would have preferred to have allowed Greatbatch to manage the affair in furtherance of his own secret scheme. But he could not well refuse to accept the services of this influential Colonial, which he had at first earnestly desired. He saw that his associate was feverishly anxious to avoid any charge of complicity in a mere piratical outrage.

Controlling himself, therefore, he followed his companion on board one of the ship's boats, which lay ready to convey them to the sloop. Greatbatch had gone forward so far as to bind and render helpless Captain Jenkins and his men, while Evelyn had been torn from her father and imprisoned in the cabin. Boarding the "Anna Maria," they saw to their astonishment the prostrate figure of a man, lying on a pile of sail cloth, whom, to the dismay of Henricus Laurens, they discovered to be Gerald de Lacey. They stood a moment in some perplexity, till Greatbatch coming hastily forward declared that when he had attempted to separate the young lady from her father, the latter had fought like a wild-cat. "I had like to have lost my life," the pirate said, sullenly, "and he got a scratch."

Breathing freely when he heard the smuggler's statement that Mr. de Lacey had received but a scratch, and more anxious than ever to put matters on a legal basis, Mynheer Laurens drew near to the wounded man, and by the light of a lantern above their heads, which relieved the growing darkness, began to read the warrant for the arrest of one Gerald de Lacey and his daughter, described as Popish recusants, accused of various felonious and reasonable practices, contrary to the laws of England and of the Colony of Manhattan.

It was a strange scene. The tall figure of Captain Prosser Williams kept somewhat in the background, with a cynical smile on his pale face; Henricus Laurens flushed with fanatical rage and exultation as he read, while Greatbatch, unusually silent and subdued, stood by, his coarse face giving signs of perturbation. In the shadow, so that the light scarcely touched him, lay the accused, who had fought a brave, though unavailing fight in defense of Evelyn.

TO BE CONTINUED

A MYSTERIOUS SICK CALL

The incident I am about to relate is a true one; it was told me by the priest to whom it occurred, although I am not giving his name nor that of the town where his church was situated.

In a certain large English town where poverty and destitution were rife, was a crowded court in which the houses were built so close together that the air was a squalid, forlorn appearance; some apparently falling down and leaning one against the other as if for support, and most of them having broken windows; the missing glass being replaced, by many of the inmates, probably the more chilly ones, with brown paper or bits of rag. These houses were let to several families, each room being so overcrowded that it was a wonder fever and disease of every description were not more busy in supplementing what semi-starvation was daily doing—decreasing their number by death. Half-clothed and sickly-looking children played listlessly on the doorsteps, or floated their mimic boats of wood or paper on the stream of dirty water which from the gutter ran down the center of the alley; but all the little ones were more or less weak and weary for active exertion. Hardly any but its inhabitants passed through the court. Even the costermongers seldom visited it, excepting perhaps on a Saturday night when they wished to get rid of their refuse stock. Poverty was too apparent to make a sale a likely event.

In a tiny attic of one of the houses, on a little truckle bed, lay a poor woman, old and sick. Her surroundings, poor as they were, were scrupulously clean, and the room tolerably airy, for being at the top of the house (the highest the court could boast of) its little open window let in air. Seated by the bedside on the only chair which the room possessed was a little girl, from her size appeared seven or eight years of age, although she bore upon her face that look of premature age so noticeable amongst very poor children, more especially girls. On a rickety table standing near the bed were a few slices of dry bread and a cup containing some very weak tea, which the girl now and again held with evident solicitude to the woman's lips.

"Drink some yourself, Nellie," said she at last, with an effort, as if talking pained her. "Oh, no, Grannie," replied the child, "I'm neither hungry nor thirsty. Don't you know that kind man at the milk shop gave me such a nice drink of milk this morning, when he brought these flowers of me. I wanted to bring it home to you, and if he had lent me a jug I would, but he made me drink it."

"He saw you were tired, dear,"

the woman said; "but take a piece of bread with you when you go out, for you may get hungry before all your flowers are sold; and I'll try and sleep whilst you are away."

Upon this Nellie proceeded to tie up in bunches some cowslips, bluebells, and other field flowers, which were in a basin of water, and arranged them in a little shabby hand basket. This done, she put on her tattered straw hat, and gently kissing the old woman, who was now asleep, she stole quietly out of the room.

A few weeks later a Catholic priest might have been seen returning to his home after an evening spent in making sick calls amongst the poor. His church was the only one in the town, and he was the sole priest.

He was tired and longing for a rest, so that his house-keeper's words when she opened the door were all disappointing to him. "There's another sick call for you, Father," said she, "and the young man who brought it said he hoped you would go soon."

"Of course, I'll go at once, then; but where is it?" inquired Father Browne.

In Recket's Court, Father; the other was to a generally known for his kindness and benevolence, not only to his own flock, but also to those outside the Church, so that many a hat was raised and many a word of greeting spoken to him as he made his way along the streets.

It was spring time, but night was coming on, so that when he got to Recket's Court, which was devoid of lamps, he could not find the number he sought, and had to inquire of a man who was leaning against a door-post smoking his pipe.

"Oh! this is No. 4," replied he to the question. "Then it was to this house I was sent for," said Father Browne. "Can you tell me who are Catholics here?"

"Catholics," echoed the man, "there be none in Catholics here; leastways I don't know of none, nor if it come to that of any other religion neither. Where can such as we find the dress to go to church? When Sunday come round we're only too glad for a little bit 'o' rest."

The man said this at intervals with his pipe between his lips, puffing away as he spoke, and in a sullen, rather rude manner.

"But I am sent for, so I suppose there is someone ill in the house," said the priest. "I don't know nothing about your being sent for, sir," replied the man; "and as to sickness, there's always some one sad, sick, or sorry here; but there's an old woman up top that's mortal bad I believe—the child Nellie was crying about her this morning."

This was enough for Father Browne, who, after ascertaining which was the poor woman's room, climbed the stairs to find it. A knock at the door brought out little friend Nellie, and the priest walked to the bedside of the sick woman, who to his question if she had not sent for him replied feebly that she had not.

"But you are a Catholic, I suppose?" said Father Browne.

"Yes, I am not; I belong to no religion in particular, and there's so many churches one cannot tell which is the best; but I ask God every day of my life, oh so earnestly, to lead me His will; I want to do it, sir."

The woman's long speech had somewhat exhausted her, and the priest waited a few minutes before again addressing her. He then quietly spoke of religion in a general way of God's love for His creatures, etc., and not only this, but he inquired into her position, for, from what he saw of her surroundings he feared that she must be suffering from the direst poverty, and that probably she was needing even food.

It was too late then to buy anything, but he told Nellie to come to the Presbytery early in the morning, when his housekeeper should have a few things ready for her to take to her grandmother. He then left, after promising at the sick woman's earnest request to come again next day.

His visits after that were frequent, for he here saw a soul longing to be saved, and notwithstanding his first hope that the food and comforts he was now supplying her might eventually restore her to health, he soon saw that her end was not far distant. Her spiritual condition was, however, a great consolation to him. She looked with avidity and childlike confidence all that he taught her, and her simple faith was most touching, and when at last, after instructing in all that was necessary, he baptized her and brought her into the true fold, her expressions of gratitude for her new-found happiness were a cause of great thankfulness to the priest, who had been God's instrument.

From time to time he had learned all her circumstances. She had been the wife of a clever, well-to-do workman, but one who had met with evil companions and lost all through

drink, so that when he died he left her penniless, and she had to support herself as a charwoman, until from age and sickness she lost most of her work, and was at length as reduced as to be compelled to rent that poor little room in the cheapest and worst neighborhood of the town. A neighbor in an adjoining room had been very kind to her and helped her much, although nearly as poor as herself. When this good neighbor died and left her little girl quite destitute and without kith or kin to take her, she had adopted her, though the little one was then only five years old, and needing food, which often she could scarcely give her.

This latter part of her history the poor woman scarcely dwelt on, and evidently shrank from mentioning anything that might redound to her credit; but when she came to Nellie's care of her, there indeed, she was eloquent. "For didn't Nellie," as she said, "provide for her now?"—her Grannie as she had taught her to call her—going out every morning into the fields, when the flowers were in bloom, and making up pretty little nosegays and selling them. And then when there were no flowers to be had, she would go to the small houses on the quay, and earn employment cleaning doorsteps, running errands, etc. There never was such another little maiden, by the old woman's account, and she loved her as though she were a child of her own. Now that she knew herself to be dying the little girl became her one anxiety. "What would become of her?"

Good Father Browne soon eased her mind in that respect. He had been interesting himself about the child before her Grannie broached the subject, and had found a kind lady amongst his parishioners willing to befriend her. It was not long before this lady came and made friends both with Nellie and the dying woman. Nor did she content herself with one visit, but might have been frequently seen with Father Browne at the poor woman's bedside, trying to make her last days on earth happy. When the end came she took the half broken-hearted child to her own home. It was never discovered who brought the sick call, although Father Browne was most indefatigable in his search and inquiries. He at length began to look upon it as miraculous, for he said that if we are to believe that God would send an angel into the desert to baptize, rather than allow an earnest soul to lose salvation, might it not be that this poor woman, striving as she did to do God's will, was saved in like manner? He used to say that her Angel Guardian was the messenger.—F. C. Davis, in the English Messenger.

RENE BAZIN

EXTOLTS THE MEN WHO ARE FIGHTING IN TRENCHES IN FRANCE

Among the soldiers at the front the religious reaction, so noticeable when the War broke out, has somewhat changed its character. It has lost its novelty, and, therefore, something of its attraction for shallow minds; but in souls more deep and thoughtful it has implanted habits that will survive the War, to which they owe their existence.

A symptom of the enlightenment that these religious habits have fostered is noticed by the well-known writer and academician, M. Rene Bazin; the convert and believing soldier are no longer merely anxious to save their souls by making their peace with God; they are so eager to Christianize their country.

M. Rene Bazin is in touch with many unknown soldiers, he willingly speaks of his experience in this respect, and from one so highly conscientious they may be received as absolutely true. He notices, among his unknown correspondents, who are mostly men of the people, a growing feeling that the official attitude of the French government with regard to religion is unsatisfactory. To arrive at this conviction has been a work of time; it is the result of experience and of reflection, but it has more value than a spontaneous act of faith, prompted by fear of death, and it holds more promises for the future.

These soldiers clamor for prayers. "You are not doing enough for God," writes one, who is only 250 metres from the Germans. Another writes that victory will only be complete when public prayers are offered; a third that France must publicly return to Christ and then all will be well.

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