

A SAIL THROUGH THE AIR. AN INCIDENT IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

"Oh, yes," said the stranger, who was seated opposite to me, "I was in the war."

We were in the night mail on our way to Holyhead. There were only two others in the compartment; a chance observation had led the conversation round to Lincoln and Grant, and one of the quartette had asked the speaker, who was evidently an American, if he remembered anything about the famous Civil War.

"Yes, I had two years of it, and then I was invalided."

"Wounded?" I asked.

"No, not to speak of: lungs gave way in consequence of a bad night's sleep."

"Would you mind telling us about it?" asked one of the party.

"Not at all, if you don't want to get to sleep."

No one did, so the American settled himself down in his corner and began.

I was with Stanley down by Stone River, I was never backward in volunteering for risky expeditions, but I was fairly successful in getting clear. However, one night I was sent for and told I was to pass the picket lines to gain information as to a recent reinforcement which had joined the rebels. The plan was to run the pickets at night, spend the next day in hiding somewhere, and return the following night.

I'd had similar jobs before, and set off on this one without any extra misgiving. I had to cross a branch of the river about thirty feet wide, but I managed that easily enough with a couple of planks. I took more care than usual in piloting myself across, for it was fearfully cold weather, sleet and hail and all the rest of it. Passing the pickets was not so easy, but by biding my time I managed it, and found myself before daybreak well within the Confederate lines.

My idea was this. I knew the disposition of the camp exactly; if I could get a good post on the top of a tree, or on some height, I could observe the additional tents and calculate the number of the reinforcement. The difficulty was to get a good post for observation which would not be conspicuous.

About a mile away was a light eminence with an old windmill on its summit. The sails were still, and there was a general look of idleness about it, as was to be expected, seeing that the army was so near. I concluded that such a splendid post for observations would be pretty certain to be occupied; however it was worth making sure of. I therefore crept to a tree and carefully looked at the door of the windmill through my field-glass. I watched it for an hour—there was no sign of a human being. This made me bolder; I crept forward again, taking good care to keep myself from view, and again watched it. Still there was no movement. This was odd; if soldiers had been there there must have been some sign of them in two hours. I was becoming bolder still; I advanced to within a few yards, then crept up to the back of the mill and listened. Not a sound of any kind. Three minutes after I was inside.

This was such a tremendous piece of luck that I could scarcely help thinking there was a trap of some kind. However, there didn't seem to be, the place was deserted as the Sahara. I lost no time in getting to the top of the mill, and opening the trap-door which led to the parapet round the roof, put my head out to make my notes.

I had a fine view of the valley, and in about a couple of hours I had drawn a map of the situation and made a lot of valuable notes. By that time I thought it prudent to withdraw; the day was getting on and I had not had anything to eat yet. It struck me that it was very odd the mill was unoccupied, and that in all probability some men would be coming to make a reconnoitre from it some time during the day. So I determined to shelter in the woods till night.

I shut the trap-door and descended the crazy ladder to the next story. Somehow or other my foot slipped as I was doing the next piece, and I fell. I snatched at a beam and just saved myself from coming smash to the bottom. I was hanging by one arm and a leg for half a minute before I recovered myself. Then I crept down to the floor and slipped out.

I had had rather a shock; one gets accustomed to changing being shot and so on in an

engagement, but a near touch of breaking a neck unnerves one almost as if he were a civilian. I got among some trees about a hundred yards away and lay down for an hour, eating some crackers that I had in my pocket. Then I felt in my pocket for my papers.

Here was another shock; they were gone. They must have fallen out of my coat when I was swinging on that beam, and I had never noticed it. This was a great nuisance, as it necessitated another journey to that old mill. However, it had to be done; I couldn't return without my notes, and the longer I delayed fetching them the more risk of a picket coming into the neighborhood.

I was on the point of hastening across the piece of open ground which surrounded the base of the mill, when I saw the gleam of steel among the trees not fifty yards off. I drew back to my shelter like a snail into its presence. They advanced to within a few yards of the mill; I was on tenterhooks for fear they would enter it and discover my pocket-book. But they halted on the shell, half afraid. I was discovered. But apparently the party were ignorant of my open space, a sergeant put a white mark on the side of the wall near the door, and commenced making some measurements on the ground. Evidently the position was to be occupied as a military post; that meant an advancement of their permanent lines almost to the edge of their pickets. If only they had postponed it for another day!

I watched the work progress with fearful anxiety, but they seemed in no hurry to go. The only consolation was that no one entered the mill. At last, about three o'clock, the party retired, leaving one man on watch. I watched them out of sight and then took my decision.

The sentry walked round and round the building in a monotonous circle. If I could reach the back while he was at the front, I could slip into the door while he was on the opposite side. I waited ten minutes for a favorable opportunity and then made the attempt.

The sentry was in front of the door as I reached the back of the mill. I waited to hear his slow tramp in my direction, which would enable me to reach the front, but to my horror no steps could I hear. He had chosen that moment of all others to halt in front of the door.

Judge of my feelings when I heard a voice in command apparently not two hundred yards away. It was too late to retreat. I could not advance. What was I to do?

However, the sentry heard the voice too, and recommenced his march. I followed him on hands and knees, reached the door and crept in just as the heads of the men appeared over the crest of the little hill.

I was safe—but safe in a trap. However, I did not despair; they might not remain, and if only one man was left on guard I might at the worst manage with him. I found my pocket book and ascended the ladder up after me as quietly as I could. It was scarcely done before an officer entered the door.

"Hello! sergeant," he said to a man following him, "where's the ladder?"

"Don't know, captain, it was here yesterday."

"Then it must be here to-day; there's been a guard here, I suppose?"

"No, sir, the colonel said that—" I lost the rest of the sentence, evidently explaining why the place had been left unguarded. The officer looked very annoyed.

"Take a couple of men and get a ladder or rope, whichever you can find quickest, and tell Peterson to come here with eight men."

This was pleasant for me to hear, but worse was coming.

"Some of Carter's men have been here, I expect," said the captain to a lieutenant who had just entered, alluding to a band of free rangers that was the pest of both armies.

"They may be up there now," remarked the lieutenant.

"Give them a shot on the chance."

A moment after a bullet came whizzing through the trap-door. I managed to keep perfectly still, though it came unpleasantly near.

"Isn't worth while to waste powder till we know if any one's there," said Morgan, the young officer. I recognized him. I had once before been very near him in one of my expeditions.

"Any one here 's in a trap, at all events," said the captain contentedly; "there's no window big enough for a man to get out of, and he can't jump off the top. We can afford to wait."

I have twenty minutes to decide on what to do; by that time the sergeant would be back. I thought over all possible schemes of escape, but there was no one which seemed practicable. I might shoot the three men in the mill, but there were several more outside. Was there a hiding-place higher up which would conceal me against a search?

I determined to look. It was dusk by now, the night did fair to be a stormy one, a lurid light on the horizon showed where the sun had lately set. All this I could see from a small bulseye window, but round me it was rapidly becoming too dark to distinguish anything. I rose as quietly as I could and crept to the foot of the next ladder, taking off my boots to make less noise.

I reached the second and last floor in safety, I did not dare to draw up the ladder for fear of making a noise, so I crept about trying to find a crevice in which I might hide and cover myself up with loose planks and old sacking. But the conical-shaped room afforded no shelter; there were only the bare walls with occasional useless beams.

Then something happened which decided the question of hiding. My foot struck against a loose piece of iron, which fell clattering down the trap-door to the next floor. It made noise enough to startle a regiment. The instant reply to it was a shout, "Who's there?"

I made no answer. Almost immediately I heard the voice of the sergeant, who had returned with his men, they had brought a rope with them. I could hear an excited colloquy, but could not distinguish the words; then there was the sound of the rope being thrown up to the trap-door with a piece of wood attached to catch crosswise in the opening. A few minutes more and the captain and lieutenant were on the floor immediately beneath me.

Again they shouted up, but I made no reply. It seemed to me it was no good to do so. I was certain to be hanged as a spy even if I surrendered, so I had determined to fight it out. Soon the rope was thrown up to the trap-door near me, but I was prepared, and pushed it down again. They had lanterns so I could see them, while I was invisible, and thus far I had the advantage. However I could not keep it; shot after shot came whizzing up the hole and through the thin planking. I had to retreat as far from the hole as possible.

It was only a question of minutes now. It was true I could get on the roof; but what good would that do? They would follow me, and I must surrender or jump from the parapet and be dashed to a pulp forty feet below. However, one sticks to one's life pretty desperately, and I made for the roof. Up there I could at least hold my own for a time.

I climbed out and shut the trap behind me, closing it with a bar of iron. There had been no fastening to the other traps. Here I waited for what might happen.

A bullet soon showed that my pursues were just beneath me. I did not much fear their shots, as they had no idea which part of the roof I was on. Just to show them that I was in earnest I fired once or twice in return, but could not tell with what effect. I heard more men come up; they pushed and battered against the trap till I feared it must give. Then I heard the captain tell the sergeant to bring up his men and a beam to smash the door with.

The order was soon obeyed. The first blow was ineffectual, but it was evident a few more would remove the last between me and death. I looked wildly around me; nothing but black sky and rushing clouds, while just over my head towered the long, raking sails of the mill.

Crash! the first hole was made and I saw the end of the beam protruding from the broken plank. A desperate hope flashed through my brain. I kicked aside the clamp which held the sails motionless, climbed up the tottering wood-work and leaped to my right, clinging with all my might. Slowly the sails began to move, then more quickly. I held my breath as they rushed through the air. Swiftly I flew with fearful velocity, passing on within six feet of the ground and then up into the air again like the pendulum of a clock. Before I had regained my breath and senses I was hanging by arms and legs to the motionless sail.

Crash! the door was broken through now. The sound brought me to full consciousness. I slid to the extremity of the sail and dropped to the ground. Another moment, and I was running for my life towards the river. It was a race for life, as the pickets were alert. More than one rifle ball flew past my ears but the darkness favored me and I reached the river in safety. Without hesitation I plunged into the river and swam to the other side. But that was my last effort; I fell on the bank and couldn't rise. When I was found early in the morning by a reconnoitering party which Stanley sent in search of me, I was a mass of ice. I was insensible for several hours, and when I recovered my consciousness I found I was in for a complicated illness. The excitement and cold water had been too much for me.

However I had brought very valuable information, and the colonel exerted himself about me, and I retired invalided under very satisfactory circumstances. I hope I haven't bored you gentlemen.

We assured him he had not, and to make him certain of it I asked him to tell the story in print.

"Oh, yes, if you like, only don't put my name in it."

"I shall be sure not to," I replied, "for I don't know it."

"Ah, no, no more you do. Never mind, so much the better."—*Boy's Own Paper.*

PUZZLES.

BEHEADINGS AND CURTAILINGS.

1. Behead me, and I am hungry no more; Curtail me, and see me flat at your door; Complete, I will prove true to the core.
2. Behead me, and I can look very wise; Curtail me, for something I give baby cries; Complete, and religion under me lies.
3. Behead me, and I have a glorious aim; Curtail me, and steam and horse I can claim; Complete, and I take an humble name.
4. Behead, and I am blacker than night; Curtail, and I can reach any height; Complete, and I hint that all's right.

AN OLD PUZZLE.

Read correctly the following:—

Stand take to takings
I you throw my;
and if you stand stand it,
don't that I.
I will have to put neat
you
the table until you
stand
do it.

INCREASING AND DIMINISHING DIAMOND.

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1. A consonant; 2, the whole; 3, a narrow way in a city; 4, water impregnated with salt from the ashes of wood; 5, a vowel.

HIDDEN PROVERB.

A word in each line.

1. Is there room for all in the carriage?
2. What time is it?
3. Do not hurry so!
4. I received a gold pen for a Christmas present.
5. Have you ever met that lady before?
6. How that diamond glitters in the sun-light!

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES.

ENIGMA.—Holy Bible.

SQUARE WORD.—E M E N D
M A Y O R
E Y R I E
N O I L S
D R E S S

JUMBLE.—Speak gently! (is a true thing
Dropped in the heart's deep well;
The good the joy when it may bring,
Eternity shall tell.

PHONETIC CHAOS.—Famous (Fay, mus).

SYNOPTICALS.—I, B—earring. 2 St—orange.

REB Your back walnut sewing-machine tables, your cabinet organ, or any other solid piece of furniture you may have, with a cloth moistened with kerosene oil, and you will quickly see an improvement, but keep it away from varnish.