

THE RED SEAL

(Continued from page 10)

"The King's!" cried the man, catching at the word. "Which king, pray? Answer me that!"

As the firelight blazed out and the flames lighted up the figures as well as the faces of the group, momentarily increasing in numbers, about the two horsemen, Reginald saw that each one had somewhere about his person, either fastened in his hat, pinned in his surtout, or tucked into his leathern belt, a tag of the ribbon about which Katherine Allardyce had spoken to him.

The lieutenant put a finger to the rim of his plumed hat in salutation. "I know of but one king in this realm of England—James Stuart, by the Grace of God."

Loud outcries from the mob greeted the words. "Death to the Papist! Long live the liberties of England! Down with tyrants!" Cries like these resounded from all sides. The smiths had left their forges and ranged themselves outside, ready to take their part in any way that suggested itself. The shouts made the lieutenant's strong-built Somerset hunter rear, and its rider was fully occupied for a minute or two in quieting his steed. Meanwhile, his brain was busy in trying to fashion a solution of the difficulty they were in. It was clear that the neighborhood was in a state of ferment, which was hardly removed from a condition of absolute rebellion and attempted revolution. The bonfire was built up; it only required the meeting of flint and steel to light a conflagration which all England would witness. Reginald was not afraid for his own life, but he did not wish to be the hinge on which a great door of historical significance might turn. He felt, too, not a little sympathy for these men, misguided undoubtedly, embarked on what he felt to be a hopeless cause, risking their lives and all they possessed and held dear for a man who, except in the beauty of his face and person, was in no way worthy of their self-sacrifice and loyalty. When he had brought his horse to a state of subjection, Reginald bent down in his saddle, so that only the grizzled leader, who still had a hand on the rein, could hear what he had to say.

"Can I speak with you a word apart?" he asked.

The man looked at him with deep-set eyes, from under the somewhat shaggy penthouse of his brows.

"Is this an artifice to get away, young sir? Or do you think to match me alone?"

"I wish to speak to you such sense as you can understand, and which these men probably cannot."

The man nodded. Perhaps even he, under the mask of his resolute, case-hardened exterior, was open to the influence of the implied compliment which underlay the lieutenant's words. At any rate, he waved to his supporters to stand further back. "I would speak to this gentleman," he said. With some mutterings of disapproval—or, at any rate, question—they did what they were bid.

Meantime, David Colbert, a few paces away, had let his horse crop the lush grass by the roadside with apparent unconcern. His eye, however, was cast warily round to take action, or come to his master's help in a moment, if the smallest opportunity presented itself.

"Well?" asked the stranger. "What is your will to say to me, young sir? We are about business which brooks no delay. So please let me hear you at once!"

"I certainly will not detain you longer than need be, especially as I am anxious to be on my way. I think I cannot be mistaken that I am addressing myself to a brother soldier?"

The grizzled man ignored the fraternal adjective. "God forgive me if I have erred in my calling. I have been a man of war from my youth up; I fought under the two greatest men that ever lived in this land—Robert Blake and the Protector, Oliver Cromwell. Of late I have enlisted in the service of a foreign country—no less than the forces of Holland, our ancient enemies whom Blake drove from the seas, wresting the mastery from them. Nevertheless, they are brave fighters, and for the most part God-fearing men."

"I speak as a soldier to a soldier, for I, too, have fought under a captain, whose name has reached your ears, as one wise in planning and brave and ready in executing those plans. I refer to Colonel Churchill."

"I have heard of him frequently. His Grace—I mean his Majesty—speaks often of the days when they fought together."

"You are referring to the Duke of Monmouth?"

"We give him another title, which all England will accord him before many months—perhaps even days—are past."

Then the old Ironside colonel—for such had been his rank—turned and spoke in a lower tone and very different voice, with less of the pedantic twang to which he had hitherto clung. "Do you want to make your fortune, young sir?"

"That is my intention, undoubtedly," Reginald Harbin replied with a smile. "But the route by which I hope to reach that object is not like to bear much resemblance to the one which would commend itself to you."

"You have influence with your late commander—this John Churchill of whom you spoke just now?"

"He is favorably disposed towards another thing. The man who would make Colonel Churchill deviate from the path his judgment had approved must be built of unusual mould; at any rate, I am not fashioned of such a clay."

"We have reason to believe," the colonel remarked, half as an assertion, half as a query, "that Colonel Churchill is not too well satisfied with the present state of affairs, and that his ancient association with him whom we believe to be the rightful heir to the throne would render him not disinclined to cast in his lot with us—under certain conditions." Colonel Haggis—for that was his name—searched the lieutenant's face eagerly.

"I think you are both right and wrong," the lieutenant replied. "Right in thinking that Churchill has a deep affection for Monmouth, as you will permit me to call his Grace, under whom he served when Turenne was in command of the allied forces, wrong in thinking he would turn—" he stopped. "Traitor," he was about to say, but the word hardly sounded courteous in present company, not to say diplomatic—"against the king to whom he has sworn allegiance, and whom he honestly believes to be in the right."

A sneer passed over Colonel Haggis's features.

"If you have so much trust in Colonel Churchill's adherence to his master and to a lost cause—"

Reginald interrupted him. "You speak of a lost cause. Are these the materials upon which you and your master"—with a stress to the last two words—"are relying?" As the lieutenant spoke he surveyed the crowd watching the colloquy with sullen faces, wondering at its duration, none of them armed alike, few dressed alike.

"He will have help from Scotland."

"May it do more for him than it did for King Charles!" Reginald put in ironically.

Colonel Haggis went on, unheeding. "The king will bring with him not a few trained soldiers of different nationalities, well skilled in all the science of war, who have learned it in many a fight."

"To conquer England?"

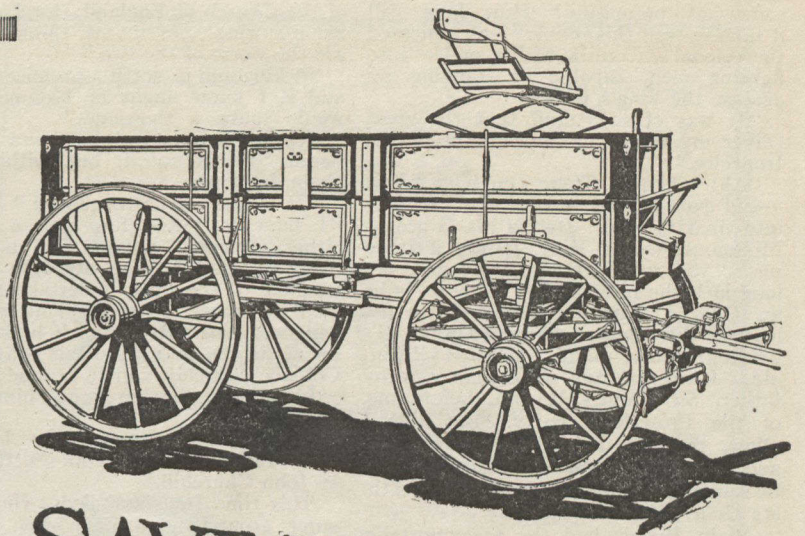
"No; to help this realm to shake off the iron yoke of the Scarlet Woman, and of her cursed crew," answered the ex-Roundhead savagely, stung by Harbin's quiet question.

"Is that their only object in coming—these soldiers of fortune—to free England from Papal pretensions? They will doubtless return directly this is accomplished, expecting nothing more, no broad lands, no tithe from taxes and the mint?"

Haggis's glance shifted from rider to horse and back again, as the lieutenant plied him with these sarcastic questionings.

"They will, of course, expect some reward, but it will not be obtained from those who are loyal to the cause. The Papistry of this land must pay for all its folly and sin." Every now and then the ex-Roundhead forgot his diplomacy and put off the mask.

"You have early acquired the knack of apportioning the spoil and determining the penalty of resistance. Is it not all



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