

OUR SHORT STORY

"A Patriot Mother."

BY EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

"I have come to the end. Not a mouthful of food is left in my house. Good of knowledge how I shall find something for my six little ones to eat."

"It is hard, Mistress Oliver. My own case is as bad as yours, except that I have no little ones to care for," replied Mistress Morey. "What have you thought of doing? There are the Bristol mills."

"And they are twenty miles away. I could make the journey; but the British will give me no pass. Without that, I fear me, any attempt to go there would be useless. There are guards along Vine street from the Delaware to the Schuylkill, and if I should succeed in passing them, there are still the pickets to be met. I understand these have been stationed all through the woods, even as far as Frankford." And Mistress Oliver groaned in her despair as she spoke.

Truly, the situation was desperate. In that autumn of 1777 Lord Howe and his troops held possession of Philadelphia, the residence of the two patriot women whose conversation has just been recorded. The common necessities of life were becoming scant among those who were loyal to the cause of the colonies, and in their determination to subdue the rebels, the methods employed by the redcoats were daily becoming more stringent.

Out in Valley Forge, General Washington and his army were encamped, but they were suffering too much themselves from the scarcity of provisions to be able to render much assistance to their friends within the city. As if to aggravate the distress of the patriots, the British apparently were possessed of an abundance of good things, and all that was required of the people of Philadelphia to obtain a share was to declare their allegiance to King George. Small cause for wonder is it that many of the wavering men, in the sight of the distress of their own families, and the plenty which might almost be had for the asking, had renounced their loyalty to Congress and had been willing to submit to the demands of Parliament. The hope of success for the struggling colonies was dim, and the power of the mother country was apparently too great to be overcome.

With the passing of the days the contrast became still more marked. Balls, dinners, parties, and above all, the dissipation of some of the soldiers, had become almost daily occurrences, and served to mark more clearly the distress and suffering among those who were still so obstinate as to cling to the distant cause for which Washington and the rugged Continentals were contending. Strange sights were these upon which the quiet old Quaker town looked in those dark days of the late autumn of 1777.

Mistress Oliver and her friend, Mistress Morey, had been among those who still clung to the patriot cause, and their husband of each was with Washington at Valley Forge, and the inspiration and encouragement of their example had served to increase the determination of the two women. But something more than the courage of a brave man was required to feed six hungry children, as Mistress Oliver had discovered to her own sorrow.

For herself she cared little. She could endure the privations without a murmur, and even furnish encouragement for her hardy husband, who for more than a year had been enrolled among the Continental soldiers. But of late his visits had become very infrequent, for it was dangerous for him to enter into the well-guarded city, and in addition to other perils there was that of being arrested as a spy if he was taken in by any other guard than that of a soldier. Left to herself, Mistress Oliver had struggled on, doing her best to provide for her six children, but the limit had almost been reached now, and horrors of starvation were before her.

In vain she applied for a pass that she might go to the Bristol mills and obtain flour for her hungry little ones. Her petition had been roughly refused on the ground that it was impossible to grant it to one and refuse others. But also because of the fear expressed that the soldiers, who might secure would be used by the very people whom the British were determined to subdue, by fair means, if possible, but by stern if necessary. And Mistress Oliver had been silent for she was not one to refuse the pleading of others for food so long as a crumb remained in her own house.

Her friend and neighbor, Mistress Morey, had been as determined as she, yet while her own sufferings had been as keen there were no children in her household, and consequently she was saved from the anxiety which pressed more heavily upon the heart of Mistress Oliver than did her own privations and fears for herself.

Mistress Oliver was in severe straits now and something must be done. Passes had been refused her, her pleas for aid ignored, and at last, rendered desperate by the cries of her children, she had determined to attempt to make her way to the Bristol mills alone and without a permit.

She told her friend of her plan, and ignoring her protests, and securing her consent to look well to the children during her absence of two days, she prepared to set forth on her bleak morning. Tenderly she kissed each one

of the little ones, bravely holding back the tears which arose in her eyes as she thought of the possibility of never beholding their faces again. If she was to remain suffering and perhaps death were in store for them all. On the other hand, if she went, there was just a desperate chance that she might succeed, and that one chance must be taken.

It was early in the morning when she left her home. The day promised to be dark and dreary, and heavy clouds were passing low across the sky. But louder than the cries of the whistling wind in Mistress Oliver's ears were the cries of her hungry little ones, and spurred by them she walked rapidly on till she came to Vine street. There she could see the guards passing back and forth on their beats, and she saw the direction in which they were going. She instantly joined them. How could she manage to pass them?

For a time she waited, almost fearing that she might abandon her expedition after all. No way appeared, no solution came, until a party of ten or more men and women passed her, and as she saw the direction in which they were going, she instantly joined them. She did not know who they were, and no attention appeared to be given her, as she fell in with the rear of the little procession.

On they moved together until they came to the first of the guards, when a man who appeared to be the leader drew a pass from his pocket, and they all were permitted to advance. There was no conversation among her companions, and Mistress Oliver soon perceived that apparently they were for the most part strangers to one another. Doubtless that was the reason why her joining them had provoked no remonstrance.

Too well satisfied with the results of her bold attempt to dwell long upon their failure to protest against her presence, the troubled woman remained with them until the woods near Frankford were reached, then the entire party moved off in a direction opposite to the one which was hers, and as the leader turned into the other road, he also turned and hailed her.

"How now, my good woman? Come you not with us? Are you not of the company which is bound for Friend Jonathan's at Mount Holly?"

"Nay, nay," said Mistress Oliver, quickly. "I did but journey with you, but I am not of your company. I go to Bristol—that is, I go to Frankford." She had hardly added these words, when she was seized by the arm, and walked with apparent unconcern along the road which led toward Bristol.

The bold stroke was successful, and as soon as she perceived that she was not pursued, she quickened her pace and ran until she obtained a glimpse of the guard in the road in advance of her. Hastily turning aside, she made a wide detour, and successfully passed the soldier. If he saw her, doubtless he gave her but little heed, perhaps regarding her as some simple country woman.

At all events, Mistress Oliver successfully repeated her attempt, until at last she was alone in the woods, and Bristol lay not many miles away. It was almost dark when the woman entered the little town. Footsore, weary, hungry and haggard, she was, but she was now alone, and one-half of her perilous attempt had been successful.

That night she spent in the village of Bristol, and early on the following morning, with twenty pounds of flour packed in a pillow-case, she began her return, and entered upon the far more dangerous part of her bold attempt. She hid her hungry children. The presence of the pillow-case filled with flour was sufficient of itself to arouse suspicion, and now there might not be any party for her to join.

However, she once more succeeded in passing the pickets; but beyond her lay the last and most dangerous problem. She could see even in passing the guards on Vine street. To fail, when almost within sight of home, would be to add to the miseries of her present state. Determination, however, more than once carried weaker persons than Mistress Oliver through perils greater than those which beset the troubled woman; and resolutely taking up the pillow-case, she advanced, and she approached the woods which lay between the pickets of Frankford and the guards on Vine street.

A low cry of fear escaped her lips, when, soon after entering the woods, a tall man suddenly sprang from behind one of the trees and stopped directly in front of her. As he quickly raised his hand in warning, and advanced toward her, holding forth a letter as he came, the woman became silent, and although her fear had not yet passed, she watched him curiously. She had never seen him before, that much was certain, and there was nothing in his garb to explain to which side he belonged.

As she tremblingly reached forth her hand to take the letter, she instantly recognized the handwriting of her husband. Before she could open the mislaid letter, the stranger said:

"Your husband is well, madam. He has requested me to say that he will be with you shortly. Money is not over plentiful among us, but your husband is a patriot that I have consented to become his banker."

When he had thus spoken the stranger handed her a few pieces of coin, and as he perceived her hesitation, he added: "My means are ample, madam. Trust me for that, or I should not be so lavish."

So said my husband would come soon to see me. How do you know that which is impossible. How do you know me I never saw you before, and you say that you are his banker. "We are near the British lines now, and must not talk more. Take the letter and the money, and return to your home. I say that the American commander is not idle. Already he is forming plans by which you and your husband, as well as others, shall profit greatly."

His horse was a noble beast, and struck out for the farther shore, but he hadn't got more than half-way across the river before Ben said that twenty boats were in pursuit of him. The tide was running out, and that helped him somewhat, but Ben just urged his horse on and on. He finally landed opposite the old slip at Market street, and then turned and fired on his pursuers. They didn't stop, of course, nor did Ben hesitate long. He put spurs to his horse, and dashed into the woods, and that was the last the redcoats saw of him. He was soon in

dren. The pinched and hungry faces would light up with an expression of joy as she had not seen upon them in weeks.

"Hail, your pass, woman!"

Rudely started by the summons, Mistress Oliver looked up and saw a guard standing directly in front of her. To turn and flee was impossible now. The bright dreams had all vanished in a moment.

"I have no pass! My children are starving, and I have only—"

"Furies! I've heard the words too many times! Brains to eat! Brains to eat! That flour is mine, woman! Be off and die with your children, or I'll see to it that you die before that time! Begone!"

The broken-hearted woman was about to turn away, when the strange messenger she had met a few moments before suddenly appeared again. But his entire demeanor had completely changed. He was now quiet, gentle, almost pleading in his manner, and approaching the guard he besought him to permit the poor woman to pass with the little sack of flour for her hungry children.

"Who are you?" demanded the guard roughly. "Are you so great an idiot as to try to interfere with his majesty's orders? Be off, or I'll send you to the guardhouse!"

"But the woman is weary. She has walked a long distance to obtain a little food for her starving little ones. Surely you can let her—"

"Fool! Idiot!" shouted the guard, now thoroughly aroused. "Begone! I arrest you as a spy. Don't wait to anger me more!"

"You will not let the poor woman have her flour?"

"No!"

"Then, by my country's hope of freedom, you shall!"

The quiet demeanor was gone in an instant. Leaping forward he seized the astonished guard and hurled him to the ground. Before the prostrate soldier could rise, the stranger turned to Mistress Oliver and said:

"Run, woman, run! Take your flour! Go up Vine street! You'll be safe there!"

Instantly Mistress Oliver obeyed. Grasping the pillow-case and his precious load she ran swiftly along the rough road. Once she turned just in time to see the stranger draw his pistol and fire upon the prostrate guard, who was attempting to rise. She saw him seize the guard's musket and then bound like a deer into the woods.

In a moment it seemed to her as if the road was filled with armed men. Every direction they came, but the terrified woman soon perceived that it was the stranger and not herself whom the angry redcoats were seeking.

"Shoot him! Shoot him down! Don't let the rebel escape!" were the words she heard on every side.

She saw that the stranger had disappeared from sight, but his enemies were in swift pursuit, and their calls and cries, and the snapping of branches as they dashed forward after him could be distinctly heard.

Quickly recalled to the necessity of action on her own part, Mistress Oliver, with her precious pillow-case clasped close to her, sped like a deer up the Vine street, which now was largely cleared of its guards, and soon was safe within the limits of the city.

That night there was a feast in the Oliver house, to which, with the exception of the soldier who had been with her, all the neighbors were invited. Twenty pounds of flour was never before looked upon with such delight as that which the brave woman had brought from the Bristol mills. It provided a banquet fit for a king—or at least so thought all the children, and perhaps the weary mother was not of a different opinion.

"A thousand thanks to you, my dear, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee," repeated Mistress Oliver in her prayer that night, and it is doubtful whether the writer of the present story is more sincere in his expression than was the devout and brave woman who quoted his words to her little ones.

The money which her brave deliverer had given her would provide for her wants for a time, and the heart of Mistress Oliver was lighter; but again and again her thoughts went back to the brave man who had rescued her from her peril. Had he escaped? Or had the angry redcoats surrounded and seized him?

It was nearly a week after her exciting adventure, when one night a man disguised as a countryman entered the house of Mistress Oliver. His disguise was so complete that for a moment not even the wife recognized the man as her own husband; but when his strange garb was discarded, and Mr. Oliver himself stood forth in the presence of his family there was a scene such as only those who have known the meaning of a midnight raid for duty or for country could share in. The children climbed into his lap, while the weeping woman flung her arms about his neck; and there was a softened light even in the eyes of the sturdy Continental himself.

At last, after the first joy of the meeting had passed, Mistress Oliver related to her husband the story of her adventure. "I and said," she began, "the thought of that brave man who rescued me out of my mind. I'm afraid he never escaped."

Mr. Oliver smiled as he replied: "You need not have any fears for the fate of Ben Doale. He and his five brothers are able to take care of themselves."

"And did you really send him to me? Do you know whether he escaped or not?"

"He was on his way to the city when he rescued you. He had been in town frequently, and at my own request had been here. He knew you were in danger, and it was because he had reported to me that you were in dire straits that he was coming with some money for you that day."

"Did he escape?" said the woman, eagerly.

"Yes; he told me all the story. After the pursuit began he ran swiftly through the woods to the bank of the Delaware, where he had a horse concealed. As he ran he came face to face with a man, who called upon him to surrender. Ben shouted in reply that 'A Doale never surrendered,' and before the other man could act, Ben's gun spoke."

"The report was answered by shouts on every side of him, but he ran swiftly onward, and soon came to the place where his horse was. He instantly mounted, but he didn't feel that he was much safer even then. Behind him were the guards, on the north were the Frankford pickets, and on the south the city of Philadelphia, filled with British troops. The only thing he could do was to cross the river, so he urged his horse straight into the water."

"His horse was a noble beast, and struck out for the farther shore, but he hadn't got more than half-way across the river before Ben said that twenty boats were in pursuit of him. The tide was running out, and that helped him somewhat, but Ben just urged his horse on and on. He finally landed opposite the old slip at Market street, and then turned and fired on his pursuers. They didn't stop, of course, nor did Ben hesitate long. He put spurs to his horse, and dashed into the woods, and that was the last the redcoats saw of him. He was soon in

Valley Forge, and told me the whole story."

"I wish I might thank him for his goodness to me," murmured Mistress Oliver.

"I have done that already," replied her husband, "and I haven't forgotten One who watches over us all. If I didn't believe God's hand was in this rescue, and that he had called me into the service, I never could bear the thought of being away from you, and my lads and lassies, in your peril. But when he calls, and wherever he may be, I can't help but obey. If we do our best, the results are in his hands, not in ours; and he will not forsake or forget one of these little ones."—Forward.

THE SIRDAR'S SWORD

A Magnificent Weapon "With Gems and Golden Luster Rich Embellished."

The privilege of making and decorating the sword of honor which the city of London presents to Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, was intrusted to the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths' Company, and their task was accomplished in a handsome and satisfactory fashion. The sword is made of a fine blade of the finest steel, which will bear, in due course, an appropriate inscription etched upon its central space. The Original manner—that is to say, having the gold wrought and beaten in—the upper part is very pleasing to the eye, and the emblems etched upon the blade in various forms are interesting and appropriate. They serve to recall, by the bezel and by the crossed swords and by the display of the arms of the British and Egyptian flags, the city which delights to honor him, and for all lovers of fine work in and upon steel, the blade has a peculiar fascination. It is on the hilt, however, that the fancy of the artists in gold and precious stones has run riot with excellent results. It is, so far as real material goes, of solid silver, and its head is that of the British lion. The hilt, in chased and repousse work, bears on the one side a figure of Britannia, and on the other a figure of Victoria, and the hilt is encircled by a band of the city which delights to honor him, and for all lovers of fine work in and upon steel, the blade has a peculiar fascination. It is on the hilt, however, that the fancy of the artists in gold and precious stones has run riot with excellent results. It is, so far as real material goes, of solid silver, and its head is that of the British lion. The hilt, in chased and repousse work, bears on the one side a figure of Britannia, and on the other a figure of Victoria, and the hilt is encircled by a band of the city which delights to honor him, and for all lovers of fine work in and upon steel, the blade has a peculiar fascination. 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