The COURAGE of CAPTAIN PLUM

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MAGNUS G. KETTNER

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SYNOPSIS.

Captain Nathaniel Plum of the sloop Typhoon, lands secretly on Beaver Island, Lake Michigan, stronghold of the Mormons. Obadiah Price, an eccentric old man and counselor of the Mormons, who has been spying on him, suddenly confronts him and tells him he is expected. Plum insists he has got the wrong man. Price attacks his protestations and demands for the ammunition on board the sloop. He binds Nat by a solemn oath to deliver a package to Franklin Pierce, president of the United States. He agrees and shows Price the Mormon town. St. James. There sees the frightened face of a young woman in the darkness near Price's cabin. She disappears, leaving an odor of violets. It develops that Plum's visit to Beaver island is to demand satisfaction from the king, Strang, for the seizure of his ship some time previously by a mob, who he suspected of being Mormons. Strang, his mate, has been left in charge of the sloop with orders to bombard St. James if the captain does not return within a certain time. Price takes Nat secretly to the darkness to the king's house, and through a window he sees Strang and his seven wives, among whom is the lady of the lake, who Price says is the seventh wife. Price's actions lead Plum to believe that he is jealous of Strang. Plum calls at the king's office.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

Was there a tremble of fear in her voice? Even as he looked Nathaniel saw the flush deepen in her cheeks and her eyes light with nervous eagerness.

"I am sent by Obadiah Price," he hazarded.

A flush of relief shot into the woman's face.

"The king is at his office," she repeated. "His office is near the temple."

Nathaniel retired with another bow.

"By thunder, Strang, old boy, you've certainly got an eye for beauty!" he laughed as he hurried through the grove.

"And Obadiah Price must be somebody, after all!"

The Mormon temple was the largest structure in St. James, a huge square building of hewn logs, and Nathaniel did not need to make inquiry to find it. On one side was a two-story building with an outside stairway leading to the upper floor, and a painted sign announced that on this second floor was situated the office of James Jesse Strang, priest, king and prophet of the Mormons. It was still very early and the general merchandise store below was not open. Congratulating himself on this fact, and with the fingers of his right hand reaching instinctively for his pistol butt, Captain Plum mounted the stair. When half way up he heard voices. As he reached the landing at the top he caught the quick swish of a skirt. Another step and he was in the open door. He was not soon enough to see the person who had just disappeared through an opposite door, but he knew that it was a woman. Directly in front of him as if she had been expecting his arrival was a young girl, and no sooner had he put a foot over the threshold than she hurried toward him, the most acute anxiety and fear written in her face.

"You are Captain Plum?" she asked breathlessly.

Nathaniel stopped in astonishment.

"Yes, I'm—"

"Then you must hurry—hurry!" cried the girl excitedly. "You have not a moment to lose! Go back to your ship before it is too late! She says they will kill you—"

"Who says so?" thundered Captain Plum. He sprang to the girl's side and caught her by the arm. "Who says that I will be killed? Tell me—who gave you this warning for me?"

"I—I—tell you so!" stammered the young girl. "I—I—heard the king—they will kill you—" Her lips trembled. Nathaniel saw that her eyes were already red from crying. "You will go?" she pleaded.

Nathaniel had taken her hand and now he held it tightly in his own. His head was thrown back, his eyes were upon the door across the room. When he looked again into the girlish face there was flashing joyous defiance in his eyes, and in his voice there was confession of the truth that had suddenly come to overwhelm whatever law of self-preservation he might have held unto himself.

"No, my dear, I am not going back to my ship," he spoke softly. "Not unless she who is in that room comes out and bids me go herself!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Whipping.

Scarce had the words fallen from his lips when there sounded a slow, heavy step on the stair outside. The young girl snatched her hand free and caught Nathaniel by the wrist.

"It is the king!" she whispered excitedly. "It is the king! Quick—you still have time! You must go—you must go—"

She strove to pull him across the room.

"There—through that door!" she urged.

"No, I won't do it, my dear," he whispered. "Just now it might make trouble for—her."

He lifted his eyes and saw a man looking at him from the doorway. He needed no further proof to assure him that this was Strang, the king of the Mormons, for the Beaver island prophet was painted well in that region which knew the grip and terror of his power. He was a massive man, with the slow slumbering strength of a beast. He was not much under fifty; but his thick beard, reddish and crinkling, his shaggy hair, and the full-fed ruddiness of his face, with its foundation of heavy jaw, gave him a more youthful appearance.

In an instant Nathaniel had recovered himself. He advanced a step, bowing coolly.

"I am Captain Plum, of the sloop Typhoon," he said. "I called at your home a short time ago and was directed to your office. As a stranger on the island I did not know that you had an office or I would have come here first."

"Ah!"

The king drew his right foot back half a pace and bowed so low that Nathaniel saw only the crown of his hat. When he raised his head the aggressive stare had gone out of his eyes and a welcoming smile lighted up his face as he advanced with extended hand.

"I am glad to see you, Captain Plum."

His voice was deep and rich, filled with that wonderful vibratory power which seems to strike and attune the hidden chords of one's soul. The man's appearance had not prepossessed Nathaniel, but at the sound of his voice he recognized that which had made him the prophet of men. As the warm hand of the king clasped his own Captain Plum knew that he was in the presence of a master of human destinies, a man whose ponderous red-visaged body was simply the crude instrument through which spoke the marvelous spirit that has enslaved thousands to him, that had enthralled a state legislature and that had hypnotized a federal jury into giving him back his freedom when evidence smothered him in crime. He felt himself sinking in the presence of this man and struggled fiercely to regain himself. He withdrew his hand and straightened himself like a soldier.

"I have come to you with a grievance, Mr. Strang," he began. "A grievance which I feel sure you will do your best to right. Perhaps you are aware that some little time ago—about two weeks back—your people boarded my ship in force and robbed me of several thousand dollars' worth of merchandise."

Strang had drawn a step back.

"Aware of it!" he exclaimed in a voice that shook the room. "Aware of it!" The red of his face turned purple and he clenched his free hand in sudden passion. "Aware of it!" He repeated the words, this time so gently that Nathaniel could scarcely hear them, and tapped his heavy stick upon the floor.

"No, Captain Plum, I was not aware of it. If I had been—" He shrugged his thick shoulders. The movement, and a sudden gleam of his teeth through his beard, were expressive enough for Nathaniel to understand.

Then the king smiled.

"Are you sure—are you quite sure, Captain Plum, that it was my people who attacked your ship? If so, of course you must have some proof?"

"We were very near to Beaver island and many miles from the mainland," said Nathaniel. "It could only have been your people."

"Ah!"

Strang led the way to a table at the farther end of the room and motioned Nathaniel to a seat opposite him.

"We are a much persecuted people, Captain Plum, very much persecuted indeed." His wonderful voice trembled with a subdued pathos. "We have answered for many sins that have never been ours, Captain Plum, and among them are robbery, piracy and even murder. The people along the coasts are deadly enemies to us—who would be their friends; they commit crimes in our name and we do not retaliate. It was not my people who waylaid your vessel. They were fishermen, probably, who came from the Michigan shore and awaited their opportunity off Beaver island. But I shall investigate this; believe me, I shall investigate this fully, Captain Plum!"

Nathaniel felt something like a great choking fist shoot up into his throat. It was not a sensation of fear but of humiliation—the humiliation of defeat, the knowledge of his own weakness in the hands of this man who had so quickly and so surely blocked his claim. His quick brain saw the futility of argument. He possessed no absolute proof and he had thought that he needed none. Strang saw the flash of doubt in his face, the hesitancy in his answer; he divined the working of the other's brain and in his soft voice, purring with friendship, he followed up his triumph.

"I sympathize with you," he spoke gently, "and my sympathy and word shall help you. We do not welcome strangers among us, for strangers have usually proved themselves our enemies and have done us wrong. But to you I give the freedom of our kingdom. Search where you will, at what hours you will, and when you have found a single proof that your stolen property is among my people—when you have seen a face that you recognize as one of the robbers, return to me and I shall make restitution and punish the evil-doers."

So intensely he spoke, so filled with reason and truth were his words, that Nathaniel thrust out his hand in token of acceptance of the king's terms. And as Strang gripped that hand Captain Plum saw the young girl's face over the prophet's shoulder—a face, white as death in its terror, that told him all he had heard was a lie.

"And when you have done with my people," continued the king, "you will go among that other race, along the mainland, where men have thrown off the restraints of society to give loose reign to lust and avarice; where the Indian is brutified that his wife may be intoxicated by compulsion and prostituted by violence before his eyes; where the forest cabins and the streets of towns are filled with half breeds; where there stalk wretches with withered and tearless eyes, who are in nowise troubled by recollection of robbery, rape and murder. And there you will find whom you are looking for!"

Strang had risen to his feet. His eyes blazed with the fire of smothered hatred and passion and his great voice rolled through his beard tremulous with excitement, but still deep and rich, like the booming of some melodious instrument. He flung aside his hat as he paced back and forth; his shaggy hair fell upon his shoulders; huge veins stood out upon his forehead—and Nathaniel sat mute as he watched this lion of a man whose great throat quivered with the power that might have stirred a nation—that might have made him president instead of king. He waited for the thunder of that throat and his nerves keyed themselves to meet its bursting passion. But when Strang spoke again it was in a voice as soft and as gentle as a woman's.

"Those are the men who have vilified us, Captain Plum; who have covered us with crimes that we have never committed; who have driven our people into groups that they may be free from depredation; who watch like vultures to despoil our women; wild wifeless men, Captain Plum, who have left families and character behind them and who have sought the wilderness to escape the penalties of law and order. It is they who would destroy us. Go among my own people first, Captain Plum, and find your lost property if you can; and if you can not discover it where in seven years not one child has been born out of wedlock, seek among the Lamanites—and my sheriffs shall follow where you place the crime!"

He had stretched out his arms like one whose plea was of life and death; his face shone with earnestness; his low words throbbed as if his heart were borne upon them for the inspection of its truth and honor. He was Strang the tragedian, the orator, the conqueror of a legislature, a governor, a dozen juries—and of human souls. And as he stood silent for a moment in this attitude Nathaniel rose to his feet, subservient, and believing as others had believed in the fitness of this man. But as his eyes traveled a dozen paces beyond, he saw the young girl gesturing to him in that same terror, and holding up for him to see a slip of paper upon which she had written. And when she had caught his eyes she crumpled the paper into a shapeless ball and tossed it just over the landing to the ground below the stair.

"I thank you for the privileges of the island which you have offered me," said Nathaniel, putting on his hat, "and I shall certainly take advantage of your kindness for a few hours, as I want very much to witness one of your ceremonies which I understand is to take place today. Then, if I have discovered nothing, I shall return to my ship."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"No, Captain Plum, I Was Not Aware of It."

Christmas Everywhere

WHEN Christmas bells are ringing merrily on Christmas eve it is pleasant to think that the whole world is celebrating, and that as long as the human family has been on earth it has made merry at a midwinter feast. The little children in your house or mine, and the little children across the street, are just like other little children in Russia, in Norway, in France and in Italy, or the German Fatherland who have made ready for their Christmas trees when the winter's sun has set and the Christmas stars are shining over head.

At the time that the Holy Babe lay in the manger in Bethlehem to be the Christmas Babe for the Christian world the Romans were celebrating their Saturnalia and trimming willow wands, as we trim Christmas trees, of course with a difference. But just the same they were celebrating the midwinter festival. They danced and sang, gave gifts, and hung wreaths while across the Alps to the north the Wild Huntsman was chasing through the woods to be the terror of all naughty children.

The Christmas tree honored because it was evergreen gained fresh honors when adorned with tapers. The evergreen was eternal, and the lights shed glory around. How jolly is the raising of the Christmas tree! How the children love to talk about it before hand and to trim it, or to get the gifts from its overladen boughs.

In Germany the whole household goes to church. In many villages the church is left in darkness, and the worshipers carry lighted candles, coming in one by one, until it is a brilliant sight. When the season is over the old hymns are sung. "Es ist der Tag des Herrn," and Christmas greetings are heard on every side.

The Julafred, or peace of Christmas, is publicly proclaimed in Sweden and Norway. The churches are decorated, and the children are the first to enter in the gray of the early morning. No one is forgotten. The poor are remembered with food and clothing, and best of all the little brothers of the air, the birds, have a tree hung with a sheaf of wheat for Christmas cheer.

In Servia and in Bulgaria no one crosses a strange threshold if it can be avoided. Friends rejoice together, the little children dance and sing and gifts are exchanged. An ancient ceremony has to be performed by the head of every household. Before a mouthful of food is eaten early in the morning, corn is placed in a stocking and the chief of the family sprinkles a little before the householder, saying "Christ is born;" to which one of the family replies: "He is born indeed." Then the house-father has to "wish" and, advancing to the burning logs on the hearth, he strikes them until the sparks fly upward, with a good wish for the horses, another for the cattles, the calves, and the goats, and so on through the entire band of stock on the farm, concluding with a special prayer and an extra blow upon the embers of the logs for a plentiful harvest. In this manner the gods of nature are appeased. Then the ashes containing "the wish" are collected and buried secretly. As for the Yule logs, they are not permitted to burn entirely away, but the fire being extinguished the burnt ends are placed in the clefts of fruit trees so as to ensure a bountiful crop.

The more playful customs of putting hats about for presents as French children do, of baskets which Italian children make, of gift boxes and the tour of St. Nick prevail everywhere. Even in the tropics Christmas is observed, as if the cold snow lay round about. Mexico has many beautiful customs, and Catholic countries never forget the feast of the Babe in the Manger in church.

A Christmas Hymn

By Wilbur D. Nesbit

"And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not least among the princes of Juda."—Matthew II, 6.

"O, little town of Bethlehem, how still we
see thee lie"—
The song brings back the silent peace of
Christmases gone by;
Brings back the olden mystery, and sets
the heart a-thrill
With fancies of the snow-draped firs that
nodded on the hill,
With memories of ruddy lights that night
would find aglow
Which from the cottage windows flung their
banners on the snow.

"Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the
silent stars go by"—
The stars above the little town were very
far and high;
They marched triumphantly from lands
whereof a boy might dream
To other lands that beckoned him with
dawn's enchanting gleam
But under all the silent stars that marched
from east to west
The little town—the little town—contented,
was at rest.

"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the ever-
lasting light"—
The mellow blaze of memory still leaps
serenely bright
And through its wondrous necromance
the bare trees it illumes
All pink and white are radiant with snowy
apple blooms
Whose petals, when the winter winds the
branches sway and lift,
Float dreamily away, away, to pile in drift
on drift.

"The hopes and fears of all the years are
met in thee tonight"—
Are met in every little town seen in the
Christmas light,
For none of us but muses now, when this
old song is sung,
Of all the blessings that were his when
head and heart were young,
And, miser-like, he counts his store of
treasures, for of them
He builds anew at Christmas time his
"town of Bethlehem."

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True Spirit of Giving

The ethics of Christmas giving is the doing of something that represents our own unselfish natures, and is not represented by the price, but by the benefit to the recipient of the gift. It is not the one who receives the gift alone who will be benefited, but the satisfaction of having tried to help brings to the donor also a full measure of Christmas joy.

Serving man is serving Christ, and every time you take the hand of one who needs help, and every time you lift another a little step higher in human life, and every time you put a little more hope into a heart that is almost in despair and death, you are doing something not merely for him; you are making Christ's work easier for him, you are giving him a Christmas gift. As one has aptly written: "When the three wise men rode from the east into the west on that "first, best Christmas night," they bore on their saddlebows three caskets filled with gold, and frankincense and myrrh to be laid at the feet of the manger-cradled Babe of Bethlehem. Beginning with this old, old journey, the spirit of giving crept into the world's heart. As the Magi came bearing gifts, so do we also—gifts that relieve want; gifts that are sweet and fragrant with friendship; gifts that breathe love; gifts that mean service; gifts inspired still by the star that shone over the City of David nearly two thousand years ago."

Might Be Better.

"Now, Rastus," said the Sunday school teacher, after Rastus had helped to eat the Christmas dinner given to the class. "You have had turkey, mince pie, oysters, jelly, cake, ice cream, sweet potatoes, peas, corn, white potatoes, bread and butter, celery, olives, pickles, and I don't know how much else besides. Could you imagine anything else that would make Christmas pleasant?"

"Well, mum," breathed Rastus, trying to button his vest and giving up with a glad smile, "well, mum, I cain't think o' nothin', onless it 'ud be a watahmelon."

A LINGERER.

The Eldest Daughter—If Harry had lived in the old days he'd have made a good knight.

Her father—I don't know much about that—but it takes him a long time to say 'good night' now.

Sense of Taste.

From a series of experiments recently made at the University of Kansas it is evident that the average person can taste the bitter of quinine when one part is dissolved in 52,000 parts of water. Salt was detected in water when one part to 640 of the liquid was used. Sugar could be tasted in 228 parts of water and common soda in 48. In nearly all cases women could detect a smaller quantity than men.

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It's a pity that more sermons are not as deep as they are long.

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