

as if a film like that of an eagle's eye temporarily obscured it.

"Some nights since, as I was making for the English line, I stopped for refreshment at an inn where I had been accustomed to halt in my travels. To my amazement I was refused admittance by a man who stood on guard. We had a bit of a debate which ended in my overpowering him and forcing an entrance, and which was more surprised, the dozen there gathered together, or me with their sentry under my eye, it would be difficult to tell. Swords were drawn, and I might have come badly out of the encounter had it not been that a friend of mine among the assemblage recognized me."

A shade of perplexity had overspread the grim face of the general as this apparently simple tale went on. He leaned his elbow on the table and shaded his face with his open hand from the light of the two candles, thumb under chin and forefinger along his temple. At this point in the discourse he interrupted:

"I suppose you wish to mention no names?"

"I see no objection," continued Armstrong, innocently. "I take it that the men were quite within their right in gathering there, although I contended they exceeded their right in trying to keep me out of a public house. My friend was the earl of Traquair. The others I did not know, and was not introduced, but in the course of the talk I gathered that the one who had the most to say was Henderson, a minister of Edinburgh, who spoke much, as was to be expected from his trade. Well, these gentlemen, finding I was from England, asked me to carry a message to the king, but I explained that I had no wish to interfere in matters which did not concern me, and they parted to meet again somewhere else."

"Do you know where?"

"I think in Lord Traquair's own castle, but of that I am not sure."

"This is interesting. We shall, of course, try to prevent any messenger reaching the king, but I do not understand why you connect the incident at the inn with your detention."

"There was a great spore about a spy that escaped, and I have no doubt if he saw me there, and heard the proposal made to me, he might well have brought my name and description across the border. At least that was the way I reasoned it out with myself."

"It is very like you are right. Spies, unfortunately, seem to be necessary when a country is in a state of war. Many unjustifiable acts are then committed, including the arresting of innocent men, but I am anxious nothing shall be done that will give cause of offense to Scotland; a God-fearing country, and a friendly. When such injustice happens, as it has happened in your case, I try to make amends. How far south do you propose to travel?"

"I may go the length of Manchester or Birmingham. The distance and the time will depend on the state of trade."

"If you will tell me the places you intend to visit I will include them in the pass I shall now write for you."

"That I cannot just say at the moment. I wish to follow trade wherever it leads me."

"Then an inclusive pass, extending as far south as Manchester will meet your needs?"

"It will more than meet them, general," said Armstrong, with supreme indifference.

The commander took up his pen, but paused, and still shading his face, scrutinized the man before him.

"As I am not likely to see you again, perhaps it would be as well not to limit it to Manchester. You may wish to travel further south when you reach that town?"

"It is barely possible."

"As you carry no message from Traquair to the king, I can write Oxford on your permit easily as Manchester."

"Thank you, general, but Manchester will be far enough."

"I may say that we are strict about those whom we allow to journey to and fro at the present time, and if you should overstep the limit of this document you are liable to investigation and delay, and I am not like to be near at hand on the next occasion."

"I quite understand, and if I wished to go further south I would have no hesitation in begging permission of your Excellency, but I doubt if I shall even see Manchester."

"You will not be leaving Corbiton until the morning, of course?"

"No general. I know when I am well housed."

"Then, as I have much to do, I will make out your paper later, and it will be handed to you in the morning."

"Thank you, general."

With this the commander rose and himself accompanied Armstrong to the door in most friendly manner. The young man, in spite of his distrust, was very favorably impressed, for there had been nothing in Cromwell's conversation of that cant with which he was popularly accredited. The Scot had expected to find an English Alexander Henderson, a disputatious, gruff, tyrannical leader, committing acts of oppression or cruelty, and continually appealing to his Maker for justification. But Cromwell's attitude throughout had been

that of the honest soldier, with little to suggest the fervent exhorter.

After giving some laconic instructions touching the welfare of the northerner to Captain Bent, who was hovering uneasily in the outside hall, Cromwell, bidding his enforced guest a cordial farewell, ordered Wentworth to be brought to him and retired once more into the dim council chamber.

With hands clasped behind him and head bent, he strode slowly up and down the long room in deep meditation, vanishing into the gloom at the further end and re-appearing in the limited circle of light that surrounded the two candles, for the torches had long since smoked themselves out, and there had been no replacement of them, for none dared enter that room, unsummoned, while the leader was within it. The watcher in the gallery felt, rather than saw, there was an ominous frown on the lowered face as the commander waited for the second prisoner, over whom hung sentence of death.

This time a clanking of chains announced the new arrival, who was preceded by Colonel Porlock, and accompanied by two soldiers, one on either side of him. The young fellow, who shuffled up to the table, dragging his irons, cast an anxious look at the forbidding face of the man who was to be his final judge; in whose word lay life or death for him, and he found there little to comfort him. Cromwell seated himself once more and said gruffly:

"Take off those fetters."

When the command was complied with the general dismissed the trio and sat for some moments in silence, reading the frank, open face of his opposite like a poster on a wall.

"You are to be shot at daybreak tomorrow," he began in harsh tones that echoed dismally from the raftered ceiling. This statement contained no information for the youth, but the raven's croak sent a shiver through his frame, and somehow the tidings brought a terror that had been absent before, even when sentence of death was pronounced with such solemnity by the court. There was a careless inflection in the words, which showed that the speaker cared not one pin whether the human being standing before him lived or died. Allowing time to produce the impression he desired, Cromwell continued in the same strain of voice:

"I have examined the evidence, and I find your condemnation just."

The boy remembered that his father had met death bravely, asking no mercy and receiving none, and the thought nerved him. If this man had merely brought him here to make death more bitter by taunting him, it was an unworthy action; so, moistening his lips twice before they would obey his will, he spoke up:

"I have never questioned the verdict, general, nor did I make appeal." The shaggy brows came down over Cromwell's eyes, but his face cleared perceptibly.

"You own the penalty right?"

"Sir, it is partly right and partly wrong, like most things in this world. It is right to punish me for deserting my post; it is wrong to brand me a traitor."

"Ah, you have found your voice at last, and there is some courage behind it. Desertion is an unpardonable crime. The point I press upon you is this: Your life is forfeit, yet although your fault is unpardonable I do not say it cannot be compensated for. Even my enemies admit I am an honest trader. I will bargain with you for your life. You shall buy it of me and I shall pay the price, even though I do not forgive the crime."

"We will first, if you please, clear up the charge of treachery. You were visiting your own home that night, and as it is on the further side of Rudby Hall your ancestors naturally thought you had a rendezvous there?"

"No, general; it was my intention to have visited Rudby Hall."

"The residence of that foul, malignant, Lord Roddy, so-called?"

"Yes, but not to see his lordship, who is my enemy, personal as well as political."

The scowl vanished from the face of his questioner, and something almost resembling a laugh came from his firm lips.

"You are truthful and it pleases me. Why did you make a foolish mystery of your excursions? I take the case to stand thus: Your grandfather and Rudby were neighbors, and possibly friends. You were, and are, in love with my lord's daughter, but since you belong to the cause of the people this oppressor of the people will have naught of you. You have risked your life to see the girl, who is doubtless as silly as the rest of her class, as you will discover if I let you live. Stands the case not thus?"

"In a measure, sir, it does, saving any reflection on the lady, who—"

"Surely, surely. I know what you would say, for I was once your age and as skilled in folly. The question is, if you will risk your life for her, will you do what I ask of you to earn the girl and your life, or will you refuse, and let her go to another?"

"Sir, I will do anything for her."

"Then harken well. There was here before me, where you now stand, some moments since, the most plausible liar in the kingdom. He told me truths, which on the

surface appeared to be treachery to his friend, but which he was well aware I already knew. This was to baffle into believing him. He rides to Oxford to see the king, and in that I am willing to aid him. He may tell the king what pleases him, and those who send him—little good will it do any of them. In return the king is to give him a commission, to be handed to certain lords in Scotland. If that commission crosses the border we are like to have a blaze to the north of us, which I do not wish to see kindled until a year from now, then, by God—then, by God's will, I shall be ready for them. We shall defeat the Scots in any case, but if this commission reaches these malcontents we cannot have the pleasure—humph—we shall be precluded from the duty of beheading the ringleaders, without bringing on ourselves the contumely of Europe. Without the king's commission they are but broilers—marauders. With this commission they will set up the claim that they are belligerents. Do you understand the position?"

"Perfectly, General."

"The commission must be intercepted at all cost. It will be your task to frustrate the intentions of the king and his Scottish nobles. But the task is more complicated than yet appears. It would be an easy matter to run this messenger through the body, and there an end. I want what he carries, but I do not wish to harm the carrier. These Scots are a clanish, troublesome, determined race. If you prick one with a sword's point the whole nation howls. This, then must be done quietly, so that we bring no swarms about our ears."

"William Armstrong is the messenger's name, and he has powerful supporters in his own country. He was stopped as soon as he crossed the border yesterday and brought here. He pretends to be an innocent trader in cattle, and will likely keep up that pretence. I have appeared to believe all he says, and he leaves this house tomorrow with a pass from my hand, giving him permission to travel as far south as Manchester, which was all he asked. I would willingly have given him safe conduct to Oxford, but he was too crafty to accept such a thing. He thinks he can make his way south from Manchester. As a matter of fact, he cannot, but I wish to make the way easy for him."

"Of course, I could give a general order that he was not to be molested, but there are reasons against this, as we have doubtless spies in our own ranks, and a general order would excite suspicion, and would probably prove useless, because this man, south of his permit's territory, will endeavor to go surreptitiously to Oxford, and by unfrequented routes. It will be your duty to become acquainted with Armstrong and win his confidence. You will accompany him to Oxford and return with him. You will be protected by a pass so broad that it will cover any disguise either of you may care to assume. It is such a pass as I have never issued before, and I am not likely to issue again, so I need not warn you to guard it carefully, and use it only when necessary."

It reads thus— Here the speaker took up a sheet of paper on which he had been writing, and, holding it so that the light from the candles fell upon it, read aloud— "Pass the bearer and one other without question or interference from Carlisle to Oxford and return."

"The journey south will give you the opportunity to become acquainted with your man. On the northward march you must become possessed of what he carries, and when you bring it to me, you receive in return full pardon and promotion. If you do not succeed before you reach Carlisle, then I must crush him; possibly kill him as a spy. Will you undertake it?"

"Tis an ungracious office you would bestow upon me, sir. I had rather meet him in a fair fight, and slay him, or have him slay me, as God willed."

"There speaks youth," cried Cromwell impatiently. "This man is a treacherous, lying spy, whose life, by all the rules of war, is already forfeited. I propose to disarm him with his own weapons. Nay, more; I willingly save him from the destruction he merits. You are set to do him the greatest service one man can offer another. If you fail, he dies. If you succeed, he has probably a long life before him. God knows I yearn to cut no man's throat, where it can be avoided, but the true interests of England stand paramount. Would you condemn thousands of innocent men to agony and the horrors of a prolonged war, to save the feelings of a border ruffian, who intervenes in a quarrel that should not concern him?"

"Sir, you are in the right, and your argument is incontestable. I accept your command willingly."

A gleam of pleasure lit the rugged face of the general, for he was flattered to believe his prowess in controversy was no less potent than his genius in war. His voice softened perceptibly as he continued:

"We are enjoined by the word to unite the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. Your mission combines the two attributes, wisdom and harmlessness, for you are to beguile deceit and yet suffer the deceiver to pass on his way scathless. You save your country's enemy, forgiving them that persecute you. What excuse will you give to Armstrong for your desire to visit Oxford?"

"My friend, the son of Lord Rudby, is

there. Although we are on opposite sides, he has none of the bitterness against me shown by his father. I will say I wish to confer with him."

"That will serve. Now this pass is for two, and you can offer to Armstrong safe conduct under your guidance, giving what plea you choose for the absence of the man who was to accompany you, and who, it may be, was supposed to have procured this pass from me. Whatever difficulties arise on the journey must be met as they advance, and, in so meeting them, will come into play whatever gifts of ingenuity you may possess."

"If you show yourself worthy and diplomatic there is scarcely limit to what you may attain in the councils of your country. The need of the future is capable men, men earnest in well doing, energetic in action, prompt in decision, unwavering in execution. In the hope of finding you one such, I snatch you from the scaffold. The king cravenly bent your father's neck to the block, although he had shown himself to be the one strong man in his council; I arrest the order to fire at your breast, though you are yet unproven. See that you do not disappoint me."

Cromwell folded the pass and handed it to young Wentworth.

"Go. This paper is your safeguard. I shall give the order that you are to be well mounted and provided with money. Send Captain Bent to me as you pass out."

Once more alone, Cromwell wrote the pass for Armstrong, giving him permission to travel between Carlisle and Manchester. When he had finished writing Captain Bent was standing beside the table, and to him he delivered the paper.

"You will give that to your late prisoner," he said. "He is to depart tomorrow morning, not before 8 o'clock, and is to travel unmolested. You have accomplished your duties well, captain, and your services shall not be forgotten."

The silent but gratified captain left the room with straighter shoulders than had marked his previous exit. His chief looked up at the dark gallery and said:

"Come down and report yourself to the officer of the night."

For nearly ten minutes Cromwell sat at the table in silence, save for the busy scratching of his pen. Then he rose wearily, with a deep sigh, his marked face seemingly years older than when he had entered the room. Once outside, he gave Colonel Porlock the papers he had written, and said:

"The finding of the court-martial is approved, but the verdict is suspended. It is possible that Wentworth may render such service to the state as will annul the sentence against him. You will give him every assistance he requires of you, and the amount of money set down in this order. Bring out my horse."

"You will surely partake of some refreshments, general, before you—"

"No. My horse; my horse."

When the animal was brought to the lawn the general mounted with some difficulty, more like an old man than a leader of cavalry. The two silent horsemen behind him, he disappeared once more into the night as he had come.

(To Be Continued.)

## A Stack of Blues

If a black cat enters the room it is a sure sign that the "kitty" will win every time.

You seldom have to look over a bulwark of chips to see where Theory sits in a poker game.

The only way to gain practical knowledge of the game is to study the pack and the players.

The right passes in poker are more difficult to learn than those of any other secret society.

It is claimed by many experts that you should never enter a game with the left foot first, but are always safe in betting on the right hand.

Often in a poker game the clumsy blacksmith draws better than the comic artist and the matinee idol combined.

When you have learned all that the books can teach you about the game, it is barely possible that you may know enough to stay at home.

If you wish to gain everlasting knowledge of the simon pure science of poker, join in a night session with a "gentlemanly" stranger or two.

All expert writers on the great American game seem to have overlooked the highly important scientific fact that a hand worth a whole pyramid of blues tonight may compel you to lay down to your uncle tomorrow.—New York Times.

## Nursing Them Sick

"I need a vacation badly, but I can't take it now," said Dr. Price-Price. "Many of my patients are in such condition that I can't afford to leave them. They need constant nursing."

"Ah, yes," replied the man who knew. "I guess there are certain patients who if you quit nursing them will get well the first thing you know."—Philadelphia Catholic Standard.