

Otis James

The Boy Spies with the Regulators



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James Otis

The Boy Spies with the Regulators / The Story of How the Boys Assisted the Carolina Patriots to Drive the British from That State

CHAPTER I OURSELVES

It is not for one like me to make any pretense at trying to fashion a scholar's story out of the poor efforts of Sidney Hubbard, and myself, Clare Butler, to second the brave work of those noble men who, by enduring countless hardships and sparing not their own blood, finally rid the Carolinas of those leeches who claimed to be the king's servants – Governor William Tryon, Edmund Fanning and others of like brood.

I count to set down on these pages such an account as I may be able to give concerning what we of the Carolinas did in those dark days eight years before the first patriot blood was shed at Lexington, and this task is to be performed simply that my descendants may, by reading our story, use their utmost efforts to preserve the fair country which has cost their forefathers so much of blood, anguish and bodily suffering.

To begin, Sidney Hubbard is my first cousin, his mother and mine being sisters. We lived, in 1768, on the Alamance, near where, later, was fought what may rightly be termed the first battle in the struggle of the colonies for independence. Our fathers were humble farmers, with a scanty store of this world's goods, and continually ground down by those whom the king had set in authority over us, chief among which may be reckoned the Irishman Tryon, and Fanning, who was born on Long Island, if I remember rightly.

I cannot set down in my own words a picture of the Carolinas at the time when Sidney Hubbard and I were come sixteen years of age, therefore, in order that all the conditions of public affairs may be fully understood, I shall copy here what was written many years later by one who may justly style himself a historian:¹

"The passage of the Stamp Act produced great uneasiness in the public mind in North Carolina, as well as in the other provinces. Already the extortions of public officers in the exactions of fees for legal services had greatly irritated the people, and they regarded the requirements of the Stamp Act as a more gigantic scheme for legal plunder... William Tryon had been acting governor and commander-in-chief of the province from the death of Governor Dobbs, April 1st, 1765, and now began his career of misrule in America. He was appointed governor toward the close of the year. This was the same Tryon, afterward governor of New York, haughty, innately cruel, fond of show, obsequious when wishing favors, and tyrannical when independent; he was entirely incompetent to govern a people like the free, outspoken colonists of the Upper Carolinas.

"For several years previous to the Stamp Act excitement, rebellion had been ripening among the people in the western counties. The rapacity of public officers, and the corrupt character of ministers of justice, weighed heavily upon the property and spirits of the people. The most prominent evils complained of were the exorbitant charges of the clerks of the Superior Courts, whereby these courts had become instruments of oppression; and oppressive taxes exacted by the sheriffs, and the outrages

¹ Benson J. Lossing, "Field Book of the Revolution."

committed by those officers when their authority was questioned in the least. These evils everywhere existed, and every petition of the people for redress appeared to be answered by increased extortions."

It was William Husband, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, who banded our people together in what was called "A Regulation," and each member signed an agreement to pay no more taxes "until satisfied they were legal; to pay officers no more fees than the strict letter of the law required, unless forced to, and then to show open resentment; to be cautious in the selection of representatives, and to petition the governor, council, king and parliament for a redress of grievances; to keep up a continual correspondence with each other; to defray all necessary expenses, all differences in judgment to be submitted to the whole Regulation, the judgment of the majority to be final."

Each member was bound by a solemn oath to stand faithful to the cause until matters had been brought to a true and just regulation. Meetings were held regularly in the vicinity of Hillsborough, and in a few weeks the Regulation was a permanent and a powerful body.

About this time "the pride and folly of Governor Tryon led him to demand" from the Assembly an appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars that he might build a palace, and this burden, together with the many which had been laid upon us, was most oppressive.

"The inhabitants of North Carolina were now thoroughly awakened to the conviction that both the local and imperial government were practically hostile to the best interests of the colonists. The taxes hitherto were very burdensome; now the cost of the palace, and the appropriation to defray the expenses of running the dividing line between their province and the hunting-grounds of the Cherokees, made them insupportable. A poll tax of one dollar and fifty cents was levied on every male, white or black, between the ages of sixteen and sixty years of age.

"The rapacity of public officers appeared to increase, and the people saw no prospect of relief. Among the most obnoxious men who had grown rich by extortionate fees, was Edmund Fanning, a lawyer of ability. He was regarded as a co-worker with the government. The people detested him, and avoided no occasion to express their displeasure. His first open rupture with the Regulators was in the spring of 1768. Tryon issued a proclamation, half menacing and half persuasive, evidently intended to awe the Regulation and persuade the other inhabitants to avoid that association. He sent his secretary, David Edwards, to cooperate with Fanning in giving force to the proclamation among the people.

"They directed the sheriff to appoint a meeting of the vestry-men of the parishes and the leading Regulators, to consult upon the public good and settle all differences. Fair promises dispelled the suspicions of the Regulators, and their vigilance slumbered while awaiting the day of meeting. They were not yet fully acquainted with the falsity of their governor, or they would never have heeded the fair words of his proclamation. They were soon assured of the hollowness of his professions, for, while they were preparing, in good faith, to meet government officers in friendly convention, the sheriff, at the instigation of Fanning, proceeded, with thirty horsemen, to arrest Herman Husband and William Hunter on a charge of riotous conduct.

"These, the most prominent men among the Regulators, were seized and cast into Hillsborough jail. The whole country was aroused by this treachery, and a large body of the people, led by Ninian Bell Hamilton, a brave old Scotchman of threescore-and-ten-years, marched toward Hillsborough to rescue the prisoners."

Some idea may be had of our unhappy province, by aid of the above account, written in all fairness, and yet not stating our grievances as thoroughly as they should be set down, and now I feel warranted in saying that from the day of Masters Husband's and Hunter's arrest Sidney Hubbard and I began to prove ourselves *men* of the Carolinas.

We were both just turned sixteen, Sidney being but two days older than I, and already had the sheriff warned us that we must pay the taxes which had been assessed, or be sent to jail where many a poor wretch was confined, simply because he had not the money with which to satisfy the governor's unjust demands.

It was on the day after the arrest of our neighbors that we two lads met old Jacob Peyster, a God-fearing man, and one who was ready and willing to lay down his life for the good of the Carolinas.

"Why are ye abroad this morning?" he asked, reining in a mettlesome horse which he had raised from a colt, and we were forced to bring our steeds to a halt, or give fair proof that we lacked good breeding.

"We came out to learn if there was any news concerning those honest men whom the king's knaves took into custody yesterday," Sidney made answer before I, who was ever slow of speech, could do so much as open my mouth.

"Masters Husband and Hunter have been clapped in prison at Hillsborough," the old man said sorrowfully, "and unless the true men of the Carolinas take the matter in hand, they are like to be held by the brute Tryon till the little property they own has passed into the hands of his majesty's gluttons."

"You speak as if there was some hope the men of the Carolinas would resist this outrage," Sidney cried excitedly.

"Aye, lad, and so they will. Hamilton, the Scotchman, is in arms and enlisting under his flag those who love the colony better than they do the king. Have you youngsters paid the tax which is levied on all who have lived sixteen years or more?"

"It is not likely that I shall be able to do so," I hastened to make answer. "My father cannot give me the money, and the little I had hoarded up from the sale of my furs, went toward paying the last levy made against our poor home."

"It looks much as though both Clare and I might soon join Masters Husband and Hunter at Hillsborough, for I have heard it said that but a short time will be allowed us of the Carolinas in which to gather the money to pay the tax, so eager is Governor Tryon to build his palace," and as he spoke Sidney tried in vain to appear unconcerned, but I, who knew that which was in his mind, had good proof that he was in deadly fear of the arrest concerning which he spoke so glibly.

"Aye, lads, the time will be made short indeed. I hear that Lawyer Fanning is issuing warrants for those who are not down on the governor's books as having paid the unjust assessment. You are like to be deprived of liberty soon, unless – "

"Unless what?" Sidney asked eagerly as Master Peyster hesitated.

"Perhaps it is wrong for me to speak further without knowing of what minds are your parents."

"That can be easily learned; our fathers have not the money with which to pay their own tax, after giving up all they owned to aid in satisfying the thirst for gold with which the king's officers in this colony are afflicted," Sidney said with a laugh which had in it nothing of mirth.

"Then how will you answer the collectors?" old Jacob asked, eying us sharply.

"If it so be I can find a hiding-place, there will be no answer given," I made haste to reply. "Sidney and I were discussing the matter even as we met you."

"By joining the force which Ninian Hamilton is gathering you may be free from the sheriffs for a time; but it is possible that by so doing you will be charged with treason."

"Do you count on serving with him, Master Peyster?" Sidney asked, and the old man replied quickly,

"I have already set down my name as one who will serve the colonies to the best of my poor powers, for I am of the Regulation, as are your fathers. I am but now summoning all of the association to the rescue of those who are so unjustly imprisoned – those who were taken because they put faith in Tryon's sworn word."

"Where may Master Hamilton's force be found?" I asked eagerly, for now my mind was made up to join those who would measure strength against the king.

My plight could not well be worse in case I should be charged with treason, for of a verity the inability to raise such an amount of money as the hungry officeholders demanded was, in the Carolinas, a greater crime than that of conspiring against the king himself.

"The rendezvous is near Chapel Hill, where the highway crosses the New Hope River. You will not be welcomed, however, unless you go armed, for the association can provide neither weapons nor money."

Having said this much old Jacob spurred his horse on, as if afraid of saying anything which might influence us in our decision; but he need not have been so particular, because even before he ceased speaking both Sidney and I were resolved.

The dear lad turned to me with a question in his eyes when Master Peyster rode away, and I answered it by saying:

"There is naught else left for us to do. From what the old man said we know that the sheriff's officers will soon be at our heels, and anything is better than rotting in Hillsborough jail."

"Then we have only to turn back for our weapons, and the treason is complete," he said with a laugh, wheeling his horse around as he spoke.

I could see nothing of mirthfulness in the act we were about to commit, although I was none the less determined to join Master Hamilton's forces.

This hurried visit to our homes would be the last, perhaps, forever, and even under the most favorable circumstances, hiding as we should be from the sheriff's officers, neither Sidney nor I would be able to visit our loved ones, save by stealth, until many months had passed.

I say again, it was a desperate act for two lads hardly more than sixteen years of age, and yet there appeared to be no alternative.

We rode to our homes swiftly, and without indulging in conversation; each of us had so much food for thought that he could not speak of ordinary matters.

The Hubbard plantation was no more than two miles from my home, and it came first on our road.

I remained outside, not dismounting, while Sidney entered, and when perhaps half an hour had passed he joined me, turning his head ever so little lest I should see traces of tears on his cheeks.

He had with him his rifle, a brace of pistols which had been his father's, a new hunting knife, and a package which I fancied was made up of provisions.

"Did your father make any protest?" I asked while he was mounting.

"He set off for the rendezvous an hour ago," Sidney replied, doing his best to suppress a sob. "Mother believed it was best for me to join him rather than go to Hillsborough jail, and did what she might to hasten my departure."

When he was mounted we rode on to my home, and he remained outside while I broke the news to my mother.

She, dear soul, was not surprised. Old Jacob had stopped there to summon father, who was one of the Regulators, and almost before I could speak she clasped me to her bosom, saying gently and lovingly:

"Yes, you must go, my boy, and my share of the heavy burden which the Lord has laid upon the colony will be to remain here alone, trembling at every sound lest it betokens the coming of some one who brings tidings that my son or my husband has been killed. If perchance such a blow is dealt me, I shall know that you died like brave men in the performance of duty – for it is your duty to aid the oppressed. Do not delay, gather up such articles as will be needed, and then kiss me farewell; I cannot linger on the parting."

In less than half an hour I joined Sidney, giving no heed as to whether he could see the tears in my eyes, and during a full hour we rode at a gentle pace towards the rendezvous without speaking.

In that time it seemed to me that I had passed the age of boyhood and was become a man, for of a verity I had set my face towards a man's work whether I might accomplish it or no.

Then we both struggled to throw off the grief which enveloped us until the day was like unto the night, and spoke of what might be done if all who had joined the Regulation came forward in

response to duty, little dreaming of that dreadful day when so many of our friends and neighbors would lie stark and cold upon the field of battle.

It was but natural that we should speak of the possible glory to be won, and not to be wondered at that each of us believed he could perform all which might be required. We had yet to learn how great was the task set the men of the Carolinas before the yoke of the oppressors was finally thrown off.

From our homes to New Hope River was but little more than twelve miles, and when we judged that half the distance had been traversed we drew rein to give the horses a breathing spell, for they had traveled ten miles or more before we came upon old Jacob.

We drew from our store of provisions sufficient for the noonday meal, picketed the horses where they might feast on the rich grass, and gave ourselves up to a brief time of repose.

The meal had no more than been eaten, however, when hoof-beats in the distance told that a horseman was approaching, and I seized my rifle, for the sorrows which had been mine during the day made me apprehensive of danger from every point.

"Don't be foolish," Sidney said sharply. "It will be said that we are afraid of our own shadows, if some friend finds us ready for an attack. There are others beside ourselves who will ride to New Hope River this day, and he who comes is most likely one of Master Hamilton's party."

"If so he is headed in the wrong direction," I replied; but I drew back from my weapon nevertheless, and an instant later regretted having done so when Sandy Wells, one of the sheriff's officers, rode up beside us.

"We are well met, young sirs," he said in a mocking tone as he drew from his pocket two folded papers. "I was but this moment counting the miles 'twixt me and your homes, for if I mistake not you are Clare Butler," he said looking at me, and, turning toward my comrade, added, "You are Sidney Hubbard."

It was useless to deny the fact, since Sandy knew our faces full well, and I asked, steadying my voice till it sounded reasonably firm:

"What have we two lads to do with so gallant an officer as you, sir?"

"Nothing whatsoever, if it so be you have paid the poll tax which his worshipful excellency has levied on all males, white or black, between the ages of sixteen and sixty."

"You must know we have not paid that extortion to provide the governor with a palace, for it is hardly more than six weeks since a levy was made of two shillings to the acre of all tilled lands, and we, who owned not a single rod, were forced to help our fathers pay that," I said stoutly, noting the fact that Sidney was drawing his rifle toward him.

"Then must I serve these warrants to the end that I may legally take you to Hillsborough until such time as you shall pay the just and lawful demands of his worshipful excellency, Governor Tryon."

"And how may we come by the money while we are shut up in jail?" I asked, beginning to have an inkling of what Sidney would do.

"That is not for me to say, my pert gentleman. If you cannot pay the tax, here is my authority for taking you to Hillsborough," and the conceited rascal proceeded to read in a loud voice the documents he had drawn from his pocket.

I could understand but little of their purport, so filled were they with attorney's words and phrases, nor did I cudgel my brains overmuch, because of what I could see out of the tail of my eye.

Sidney had his rifle in hand, and the expression on his face told me that he had no intention of going to Hillsborough as Sandy Wells' prisoner.

CHAPTER II

A TREASONABLE ACT

So great was my excitement, knowing Sidney meditated an attack upon the king's officer, which could be called neither more nor less than rank treason and would put us beyond the pale of ordinary offenders, that I could not understand one word Sandy Wells was reading.

His voice came to me like the droning of bees in the summer, and it sounded far off. I could neither hear nor think; but all my faculties were centered in my eyes as I watched Sidney's stealthy movements.

Without really having the power of connected thought, I realized that to resist the sheriff's officer was an offense which Governor Tryon would never pardon, particularly since that officer was engaged in the effort to collect taxes. From the moment we made forcible resistance we would be the same as outlawed, and shut off from the possibility of returning again to our homes until the king's rule had been set aside in the Carolinas.

Desperate indeed would be our position once an overt act against the recognized authority of the colony had been committed, and yet I would not have checked Sidney by so much as a hair's breadth had it been possible.

Sandy Wells continued to read as if delighting in the sound of his own voice, and my comrade made his preparations leisurely, being slightly in the rear of the sheriff's officer where he could not well be seen, while the latter's eyes were fixed upon the paper.

When Sidney cautiously drew himself up to his feet by aid of an overhanging bough, clutching his rifle firmly, I knew the struggle was about to begin, and during an instant there was a film before my eyes, red like blood.

Then everything came plain within my line of vision; the tremor of fear passed away, and I was on the alert to second anything Sidney should attempt, even though our lives might be the forfeit.

Sandy Wells had nearly come to an end of the warrants which had been filled out that two lads who could not pay the sum of three dollars might be thrust into jail, when Sidney, his rifle leveled at the officer's head, said sharply and sternly:

"Do not so much as move, Master Wells, else I will send a bullet into your brain. Be careful not to take your hands from that piece of stamped paper, or I shall believe that you mean mischief!"

Sandy looked around quickly; only his eyes moved, for he must have understood that my comrade meant every word which had been spoken, and he saw Sidney standing with his rifle aimed and resting on the branch of the tree.

At such short range there could be no mistake as to the course of the bullet, and, realizing this, the officer's face grew white with fear, for of a verity he was standing very near to death at that moment.

"Would you resist me in the performance of my sworn duty?" he asked, his voice trembling and his teeth literally chattering with fear.

"That is what I count on doing. Neither Clare nor I will be taken to Hillsborough jail simply because we cannot pay the poll tax."

"Do you know that this is treason, now the warrants have been read?"

"I can well fancy that Lawyer Fanning will twist it in that way."

"Not only is it treason against the king, but you are laying yourself open to the penalties made and provided for resisting an officer of the colony."

"You cannot serve Tryon and the colony at the same time, Master Wells, and that you know right well. Does it so chance that you have any weapons about you?"

"I am armed, as you may well see."

"I am more concerned to know if you have other weapons which cannot be seen. Keep your hands on that paper, Master Wells, while Clare lays violent hands upon your sacred person in order to learn to what extent you are fitted out for taking into custody two lads whose only crime is their lack of money."

"You might have been forgiven the tax; but that which you are about to do will bring you close to the gallows," Sandy cried in impotent rage.

"Even while standing there we shall be no nearer death than you are at this instant if it so be you so much as raise a finger. Clare, take away his rifle, and search him for other weapons."

I lost no time in doing his bidding, for now was Sidney Hubbard the leader and commander.

Sandy, the livid hue of fear yet on his cheek, offered no resistance as I made thorough search, bringing to light two pistols and a long knife which would have served at a pinch as sword, and Sidney cried derisively as I laid the weapons at his feet:

"You were bravely armed, Master Wells, for the arrest of two boys who are worth in the eyes of Governor Tryon's law but one dollar and a half per head, and in fact, not the value of a penny."

"I shall live to see you hanged!" Sandy snarled.

"In which case, as I figure it, you will live to a green old age, and it may be, suffer not a few discomforts before you die."

"Now that you two villains have robbed me, I suppose I may go my way," Master Wells cried as Sidney lowered his rifle.

"Not unless your way is the same as ours, for I am not minded to set you loose until after learning what Captain Hamilton has to say on the subject."

"What?" Sandy cried in mingled rage and surprise. "Would you also take me prisoner?"

"It is no more than you would have done by us, and surely turn about is fair play."

Now it was that I lost courage. The crime of resisting one of the sheriff's officers was as great as I felt willing to commit; but to actually take him prisoner seemed the height of folly.

Sidney seemed to read my thoughts in my eyes, for he said quietly, thus showing himself to be the brave soldier he afterward proved:

"We can make matters no worse by taking him to Master Hamilton, and it seems to me wise that we get that gentleman's opinion before setting this worthy officer loose to spread the tidings of our misdeeds. Fanning and Tryon can never overlook the fact that we have refused to pay the tax; but I'm thinking it won't trouble them greatly if Master Wells suffers a little discomfort."

Sandy began to bluster, threatening us with the direst vengeance of his master and himself; but Sidney soon cut the flow of words short by saying sternly:

"You will mount your horse, Master Wells, and also do well to remember that a silent tongue oftentimes stands a man as friend."

Our prisoner ceased his threats, probably understanding that Sidney's temper was none of the best once it had been aroused, and clambered into the saddle obediently, my comrade holding his rifle ready for immediate use in case the fellow made any attempt at leaving us.

Once Sandy had mounted, Sidney fastened his legs beneath the animal's belly, as a precaution against escape, and, bringing up his own steed, seated himself in the saddle as he slipped the bridle of the prisoner's horse over his arm.

If it had been possible to do so without being overheard by Master Wells, I would have tried to dissuade my comrade from this last portion of the business, for it seemed to me that by carrying him to the rendezvous we were but bringing additional trouble upon our own heads without due justification. I was unwilling, however, to let Sandy suspect that there was any difference of opinion between us, therefore held my tongue, meekly climbing into the saddle when Sidney showed himself impatient to continue the journey.

The one fear in my mind as we set out, Sidney leading the way with our prisoner and I bringing up the rear, was that Master Hamilton and his associates would reprove us severely for having brought

the officer to the rendezvous, for it seemed certain that Sandy would hamper the Regulators to considerable extent.

However, the deed was done, and I question whether I could have changed the situation in the slightest, however good an argument I might have brought to bear. Therefore it was that I resolved to give Sidney the leadership, obeying his orders scrupulously, and standing by him as a comrade should in case our actions were condemned by the Regulation.

Sandy Wells evidently had no desire for conversation, and we two lads could not speak one with another save he heard every word, therefore the three of us rode forward in silence, keeping a sharp lookout both ahead and behind lest we might inadvertently come upon one of the officer's friends.

There is little need for me to set down all the thoughts and fears which came into my mind as we rode forward, for there is more of importance than my timorousness to be written before I shall come to an end of the sufferings endured by the people of the Carolinas in that struggle which, God be praised, finally resulted in the freedom of this fair country.

It is enough if I pass over the remainder of our journey in silence, and describe our reception when we were in the midst of the men of Carolina who, having chosen Master Hamilton as their leader, were in the act of what Governor Tryon was pleased to term "open rebellion."

The people were gathered in a thick bit of woods near-by the highway, and we were forced to give an account of ourselves to the sentinels before being allowed to ride into the midst of the large assembly, which was little less than a veritable army.

The first person we saw was my father, and toward him Sidney rode, telling our story in few words, after which he asked:

"Does it please you that Master Wells be kept a prisoner, sir?"

"I am at a loss to give you an answer, lad," my father replied in evident perplexity. "It has only been decided that we would release those who are confined in Hillsborough jail, and I cannot guess how the gentleman will view your bold act. Give him into my charge, and we will soon have the case before the Regulation."

He laid hold of Sandy's bridle, leading the horse further into the woods, while we lads were forced to remain where we had halted, because of the crowd which suddenly gathered to learn how we had chanced to come in company with a sheriff's officer.

Once our story was told it could plainly be seen that we had won the good opinion of those who listened, for without exception each man bestowed praise upon us, until my cheeks were flushed a deep red from hearing myself spoken of as a brave lad who would one day do his full share toward freeing the Carolinas from the money-gluttons who were impoverishing the people.

Well, we were made much of, and all with whom we spoke agreed that we should be allowed to become members of the Regulation, as if we were indeed men grown; but I observed with sorrow that every one treated it as a matter of course that we could not return to our homes until great changes had taken place in the colony.

The idea that years might elapse before I could see my mother again had in it sufficient to prevent me from being puffed up with pride because of what was said concerning me, and when the gentlemen were come to an end of questioning us I unsaddled my horse, taking up quarters at the foot of a huge gum tree.

In this army which had gathered responsive to the call of Master Hamilton, there were no tents or camp equipage of any kind. Each man brought everything he might need, including provisions, and the place where the Regulators encamped had more the appearance of being used for religious or social purposes, than as a military rendezvous.

Here and there, wherever it best pleased them, were the recruits which had been so hastily brought together. Horses were picketed where the best feeding places could be found, and their owners lay under the shade of the trees, walked as fancy dictated, or gathered in little squads, having no care save to keep within the lines marked out as the bounds of the encampment.

Twenty or more sentinels paced to and fro, rather for the purpose of marking the limits of the camp than because any attack was to be apprehended, and these were not so strict in their duty as to prevent those from straying outside the lines who felt the inclination to do so.

Sidney found a friend with whom he went away hoping to gain speech with our general, Master Hamilton, and I remained alone a good hour or more, when my father came up in search of me.

"The prisoner will be held until after we have marched to Hillsborough," he said by way of explaining what had been decided upon, and added with a sigh: "It is to be regretted that your evil fortune brought you in Sandy Wells' path, my son."

"It was he who crossed our path, sir," I said, trying to speak in a cheery tone, although my heart was like lead in my bosom.

"It recks little which way it was. What affects us is, that you and Sidney will be forced to remain in hiding, no one knows how long – certainly until some arrangement can be made to obtain pardon for what has been done."

"I thought the Regulators had assembled for the purpose of taking into their own hands the government of the colony, in which case there can be no question but that our sins against the person of Sandy Wells will be forgiven."

"It is not probable that the Regulation will be able to effect any very radical change in the condition of affairs. We shall march to Hillsborough to demand the release of the prisoners, and if they are given liberty, there is no longer any pressing need for us to remain under arms."

"Might the Regulators not also demand that we be pardoned?" I asked, growing cold with fear.

"I question if the gentlemen would be willing, after this display of force in order to demand justice, to ask that an offender against the laws of the colony be forgiven."

"Then what is to become of us?" I cried in fear. "Surely these gentlemen will not deliver us up to the king's officers!"

"Certainly not; your deliverance must come about without the aid of the Regulation, however. If it becomes necessary for you to remain in hiding, go with all speed to your uncle's home in Virginia, on the bank of the Dan River, and there remain until word comes from me that you may safely return."

There was no longer an opportunity for him to give me the advice which I needed. Word was passed from one to another that the order had been given to begin the march toward Hillsborough, and in a few moments all was bustle and confusion as each member of the party made his preparations for the journey.

Half an hour later the Regulators were in line, awaiting the final word, and a goodly array they presented. There were upwards of four hundred horsemen, all fully armed, and at their head Master Hamilton, a patriarch of seventy years.

The word was given, and we set off at a gentle pace, Sidney and I riding side by side, and a short distance in advance of us, Sandy Wells, guarded by two men.

The rebellion against the king's authority was begun, and from that day we might be counted by those in office as traitors to his majesty; but it could never be said that there was any treachery in our hearts against the colony of the Carolinas which we were ever ready to defend with our heart's blood.

The march had been begun near nightfall in order that we might arrive at Hillsborough early in the morning, and since the distance was but twenty miles, we were put to it to keep the animals back, instead of trying to urge them forward.

Some of the men fell asleep in their saddles; but neither Sidney nor I had any desire for slumber because of the disquiet in our hearts. With the exception of Master Hamilton, who would likely be charged with having stirred up the people to sedition, we were in a worse plight than the others, and whichever way the matter turned, it was probable we must hide ourselves in Virginia for a time.

With the rising of the sun our party halted on the bank of the Eno, opposite Hillsborough, and there discovered that the king's officers had received news of our coming, being greatly disturbed thereat.

Twenty or more men were standing near the edge of the river on the Hillsborough side, and foremost among them was Attorney Fanning, he who was equally guilty with Governor Tryon in burdening us with taxes which were beyond our power to pay.

To have seen him then, when he was in fear of his life, one would have said that the Regulators of the Carolinas had no warmer friend than he. When we were drawn up in line, waiting for the word to ford the river, Fanning shouted, holding up a bottle of rum in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other:

"We have been waiting for you, my brave Hamilton, knowing that you will not willingly do that which will cause blood to flow. Let's you and I have a glass together, and decide this troublesome business without such a warlike parade."

"You may keep your liquor for those who do not know you as well as do I," Master Hamilton cried scornfully, and our people set up a shout of satisfaction.

Master Fanning waved his hands as if asking for silence, and after a time, when those on our side of the river were inclined to hear what kind of a proposition Tryon's tool had to make, he called out as if addressing his best friend:

"Send a horse over that I may cross, my worthy Master Hamilton. I fain would give your people some refreshments," and here he held up the bottles again, "in addition to having a friendly chat with you."

Some of our men would have made a contemptuous reply, but the others motioned for silence in order that Master Hamilton might act as spokesman, which was his right.

"I'll send no horse," our brave leader cried. "You're none too good to wade, and wade you shall if you come over!"

I supposed Attorney Fanning would go back to his home in anger after receiving such a reply, and said as much to Sidney; but no sooner had I spoken than the lawyer waded into the stream, and over he came, holding out his bottles as if believing that Master Hamilton would be rejoiced at having an opportunity of drinking with him.

Our leader waved him away in short order, and then the scheming rascal went from man to man of the front rank, asking each to have a glass of liquor in token of friendship; but none would accept, and more than one gave him such insults as a truckling knave like himself deserved.

Before he had come to an end of the line, and when it must have been made plain that not one of the Regulators cared to bestow the commonest civility upon him, he espied Sandy Wells.

"What, have you resigned your office?" the attorney asked sharply, and our prisoner replied whiningly:

"I'm held here by force, good Master Fanning, having been taken prisoner by two lads."

Our people burst into laughter at this mournful reply, and hoping, most likely, to curry favor with the Regulators, the lawyer said with a grin:

"If two lads took you prisoner, I'd advise you to hold your tongue about it. Not many hours since you declared yourself to be a match for any three men in the Carolinas, providing you were not come upon in ambush."

"I was taken by surprise, even while reading the warrants for their arrest, and it's by no means to my shame, since I never dreamed they would be bold enough to make an attack upon the representative of our worthy sheriff."

"You'd best give over reading warrants, Sandy," some person shouted, and Fanning laughed at the gibe as he continued on along the line of horsemen, trying in vain to find one who would drink with him.

I must set down here, at risk of interfering somewhat with the thread of the story, two verses which were afterward written about this effort of the attorney's to curry favor with those who had come in the name of justice to rescue innocent men from prison:

"At length their head man they sent out
To save their town from fire;
To see Ned Fanning wade Eno,
Brave boys, you'll all admire.

"With hat in hand, at our command,
To salute us every one, sir,
And after that, kept off his hat,
To salute old Hamilton, sir."

I must admit that the poetry is not what might be called exceedingly fine; but it was made next night in camp by one of our Regulators, and because of such fact I think it well to set it down in this story.

Well, bow and cringe as he might, our people would not listen to Fanning, and Master Hamilton told him sharply to get to the rear lest he be trampled under the feet of the horses.

"We'll have neither you nor your liquor," he cried angrily, "and unless you get out of sight I'll not be answerable for the temper of these good friends who have come in search of Masters Husband and Hunter."

CHAPTER III

PROMISES

"The sooner we march into Hillsborough and make an attack on the jail, the better for the Cause," Sidney Hubbard whispered to me when Fanning had come to understand that not one in all our company was willing to hob-nob with him. "To sit idly here is much like admitting we are afraid to do that which we have threatened, or as if we doubted the righteousness of our mission."

It was not for one like me, who knew nothing whatsoever of warfare, to criticize what Master Hamilton might see fit to do, and yet I held much the same opinion as did Sidney.

It would have been more to my liking had we crossed the river at full speed, surrounded the jail, and forced the keepers to deliver up the keys without parley.

I would have had the matter settled in one way or another, within ten minutes, and surely there would be no more treason in the act if done quickly, than if we dawdled around half a day listening to the vapors of those who claimed to be loyal servants of the king.

We were yet drawn up in line, gazing at the town as if trying to decide whether we would go forward or back, when Master David Edwards, Governor Tryon's secretary, rode up opposite us, halted an instant to view the scene properly, and then began fording the stream.

"Whether yonder royalist will try to frighten or cajole us, he is setting about the business in proper fashion," Sidney whispered approvingly. "He can't be accused of wasting time."

"Hush!" I said, laying my hand on his to still him. "I would hear his speech with Master Hamilton, for if I mistake not he will settle the matter in short order, one way or another."

The secretary had by this time crossed the river and was spurring his horse toward where Master Hamilton was posted, and as Sidney and I watched he saluted our commander courteously, not in lick-spittle fashion as had Fanning.

"Why this war-like array, sir?" he asked, and Master Hamilton replied:

"We have come for our friends who were made prisoners even while depending upon the governor's assurance that he wished simply to hold a parley. It was a breach of faith not seemly in one who represents his majesty, and we will never brook such high-handed proceedings."

"In that you are to be commended, sir," the secretary replied, speaking fair and softly; "but I warrant you have not fully considered what may be the result of such show of force. Your friends have been taken into custody in what appeared to his excellency like a lawful manner, and it is meet they should be released with due form, else may you plunge this fair colony into all the horrors of civil war. For the sake of the people, Master Hamilton, I beg of you to withdraw, at least until his majesty's judges have time to deliberate upon the matter."

"We are here, and can work our will, therefore it would be little less than folly to abandon the advantage."

"You need not do so. I pledge my word as a gentleman that all the grievances of the people shall be redressed, if you allow this unhappy business to be settled in lawful fashion. Retire, and the matter will speedily be arranged as you desire. By so doing you may avoid bloodshed and the charges of treason."

"And we have your sacred word, Master Edwards, that all this shall be done without loss of time?" one of the party who sat near our commander asked.

"Aye, sir," the secretary cried, raising his voice that all might hear, "the affair shall be inquired into as soon as may be."

"There are other matters that need attention, sir," Master Hamilton said stoutly. "Money has been extorted by Edward Fanning, from very many here, and without color of lawfulness."

"Master Fanning shall answer to the judges of this colony, and, if found guilty of illegal proceedings, will be punished as should be the lowest of our citizens," Master Edwards cried, holding up his right hand as if taking a solemn oath.

"And will you also pledge yourself that whatsoever has been done by those who belong to the Regulation, in the effort to gain redress, remains in abeyance until the first question has been settled?" our commander asked, and the secretary replied in the affirmative.

"Here is one of your tax-collectors who, while attempting to arrest two lads, was himself made prisoner," and Master Hamilton pointed toward Sandy Wells. "Such resistance might be given the name of treason, if you were inclined to play us false."

"The act shall pass as if it had never been committed, provided that you release your prisoner. Go to your homes, and at the earliest possible moment Governor Tryon will take the necessary steps to have all this unhappy business disposed of to your satisfaction."

Master Hamilton wheeled his horse around, and, addressing our party, cried:

"You hear, gentlemen all, what the representative of the governor has promised in the name of his master. Are you agreed to do as he proposes to the end that bloodshed may be averted?"

"We are agreed," our people cried as if with one voice, and an instant later Sandy Wells was allowed to ride out from among the party, when he forded the river hurriedly as if fearing some one might try to hold him back.

"We yet have his weapons as spoils of war," Sidney said gleefully to me, "and I warrant you he will not venture near Alamance for many days to come."

"Think you we shall go free after having raised our hands against him?" I asked, hardly able to believe that such good fortune might be ours.

"We have the secretary's solemn word for it," Sidney replied, and he had no more than spoken when the command was given for our people to wheel about in the direction of Maddock's Mill.

The return was made at a rapid pace, and when we were arrived at this place a general halt was called, the assembly being told that the Regulation would be in session at George Sally's house next day "to consult upon the public good."

Sidney and I thought just then more about our own bodies than the burning questions of the hour, and after taking care of our horses we camped in a grove near the mill, with nothing save the bushes to shelter us from dew and sun.

We slept nearly eighteen hours, which atoned for the repose that was lost during the march to Hillsborough, and then, on the morning after our appearance before Hillsborough, were ready to discuss the condition of the "rebellion."

That we were included in the truce was a matter of rejoicing, for it had seemed certain we would become fugitives, hiding on the Dan River; but both of us decided that it would not be well to venture within reach of Sandy Wells, unless we were so well armed as to be able to care for ourselves.

As a matter of course we two lads went to George Sally's with the Regulators, but neither of us ventured to take any part in the proceedings, although much was done of which we did not approve.

In the first place the Regulation prepared a petition to be presented to Governor Tryon, begging that Messrs. Husband and Hunter be speedily released in accordance with the promise made by Master Edwards; that the taxes of those who, by reason of their poverty, could not raise the required amount of money, be abated; and that Master Fanning and other court officers be restrained from oppressing the people by exorbitant fees whenever a legal document was required or served.

As I chanced to know full well, neither my father nor Master Hamilton approved such a course as pleading with the governor after showing his minions that the Regulation was sufficiently strong to make demands; but the majority of the gentlemen were in favor of proving that the Regulators were not disposed to transgress the laws, and the petition was written out by Malichi Tyke, who had once served as clerk of courts.

Sidney and I were both very much dissatisfied with the turn of affairs, although we took good care not to give words to our discontent in the hearing of the gentlemen who formed the Regulation.

In our opinion we should have encamped near about Hillsborough until all which Master Edwards promised had been performed, for Governor Tryon could better be moved by a show of force than an humble petition.

However, as Sidney wisely said, it was no real concern of ours, since the elders of the association would contrive to manage affairs after their own fashion, without giving overly much heed to boys or hot-heads, and if we wished to be numbered among the Regulators it stood us in hand to obey the voice of the majority without grumbling.

It was also decided at this meeting in George Sally's barn, that Masters Rednap Howell and James Hunter be appointed deputies of the Regulation to present the petition to Governor Tryon, and that they set out at once for Brunswick, where his excellency then was.

Now the upper Carolina was not in as peaceful a state as could have been desired. Some of the more wealthy inhabitants favored the representatives of the king, and upheld them in all their iniquitous proceedings; calling themselves royalists, and us of the Regulation rebels. They oftentimes, when a fair opportunity presented itself, took the right to discipline the people who grumbled against the money-gluttons.

It was not impossible that some of these aristocrats might meet our deputies, and, being the stronger in numbers, attempt to prevent them from appearing before Tryon, therefore to put a check upon such a possibility it was decided that at least two others should accompany Masters Howell and Hunter.

It was my father who proposed that Sidney and I be chosen as the escort, giving as a reason why we two lads should be selected, that it was possible, despite the promise of Master Edwards, Sandy Wells might try to make trouble for us because of our taking him prisoner. It was better, so he urged, that we be kept out of sight until the Regulation had accomplished its work, and by accompanying the deputies to Brunswick, Sandy would not readily find us.

Master Howell himself seconded the proposition, kindly stating that he desired no abler escort than our two selves, and thus was the matter settled, much to my satisfaction, even though there was more than the shadow of a suspicion in my mind as to the reception with which we might meet.

The Regulation also decided that we four should set out as soon as Master Malichi Tyke had made a fair copy of the petition, and he was so expeditious with the work that everything was in readiness for our departure on the following morning.

We had before us a ride of about two hundred miles, and to Sidney and me, who had never before traveled an eighth part of that distance from home, the journey offered much in the way of novelty.

There were no preparations to be made save saddling our horses: we would sleep wheresoever night overtook us, and procure food at such dwellings as we came across, or, failing in this, depend upon finding game enough to satisfy our wants.

"Remember that Masters Howell and Hunter are to be obeyed strictly by you, lads," my father said to us as we were saddling the steeds, "and do not put me to shame by behaving other than as gentlemen."

As a matter of course we promised faithfully to heed his words, and with high anticipations set off, riding immediately behind those whom we were supposed to guard.

During this first day, when we were yet within our own home neighborhood, the ride was without especial incident, save that at nightfall, when we were encamped in a lean-to which Sidney and I had put up while the gentlemen were cooking a couple of hares I had killed late in the afternoon, Master Howell amused himself with writing the verses I shall set down below, and which I afterward saw in a pamphlet entitled "A Fan for Fanning," that had been printed in Boston in 1771:

"When Fanning first to Orange came,
He looked both pale and wan;
An old patched coat upon his back —
An old mare he rode on.

"Both man and mare wa'n't worth five pounds,
As I've been often told,
But by his civil robberies
He's laced his coat with gold."

When these lines had been read to us Master Hunter declared that it was no more than right Master Howell should touch up Thomas Frohock, who, as clerk of the Superior Court in Salisbury, had done quite as much as Fanning to extort money from the people, and then it was that our deputy wrote these verses, which were afterward published in the same pamphlet of which I have spoken:

"Says Fanning to Frohock, to tell the plain truth,
When I came to this country I was but a youth;
Me father sent for me; I wa'n't worth a cross,
And then my first study was to steal for a horse.
I quickly got credit, and then ran away,
And haven't paid for him to this very day.

"Says Fanning to Frohock, 'tis a folly to lie;
I rode an old mare that was blind of an eye;
Five shillings in money I had in my purse,
My coat it was patched, but not much the worse:
But now we've got rich, and 'tis very well known
That we'll do very well if they'll let us alone."

Master Howell laughingly said that as poetry the verses were of little account; but the sentiment could not be bettered, according to my ideas, and before we went to sleep that night I could repeat the lines without missing a word.

We set out on our journey next morning shortly after sunrise, and, just before noon, when we were looking for a place in which to camp, two men, attended by a negro slave, undertook to make us explain our business.

The whites had halted in the middle of the road, with the black immediately behind them, and when we advanced made a great showing of pistols.

"Halt, gentlemen, and make us acquainted with your destination and your purpose in traveling this way!" one of them cried peremptorily, and in a twinkling Sidney and I, who were slightly in the rear of the deputies, had our rifles ready for use.

"Why shall we make explanations to you or any other in the Carolinas?" Master Hunter cried angrily.

"Fair and softly, good sir," the spokesman said, looking well to the priming of his weapon. "We are told that there are in the Carolinas those who speak against his majesty the king, and with such as they we would have a few words."

"Except we are so minded, you will have no words with us," Master Howell said sharply, and I observed that he was fingering his revolver as if itching to draw it from the holster.

"You will at least explain from what part of the colony you have lately come," the stranger said, this time speaking in a more gentle tone.

"I am willing to give you so much information as that; but no more, for I deny that any person, save the king's representatives, have the right to question me. We are lately from Hillsborough."

The two strangers exchanged glances, and he who had first spoken said quietly:

"I have heard that the good people near there talk of banding together to resist the king's officers in their duty of collecting lawful taxes."

"It can now be seen how much the governor's secretary meant when he gave us such fair promises," Sidney whispered. "Edwards himself has sent these fellows in advance to prevent us from going to Brunswick."

There was much the same thought in my own mind; but I made no answer just then, for the very good reason that Master Hunter was replying to what was little less than a question.

"Our people have banded together; but it is for the purpose of declaring ourselves against *unlawful* taxation."

"And you are one of the so-called Regulators, I may suppose?" the stranger said with a sneer.

Sidney and I moved nearer until we were almost side by side with our deputies, for now did it seem certain that we were fallen upon those who would make trouble.

"We have not come out either for the purpose of discussing politics with strangers, or indulging in a brawl," Master Hunter said stoutly, drawing his pistols deliberately. "It is our purpose to ride forward without too great delay, and if you oppose us the blood which is shed will be upon your heads."

"Might it not interest you to know who we are?" the stranger asked menacingly.

"Not a whit; *we* are peaceful travelers who pursue our journey without molesting any man who does not seek a brawl. We shall go forward at whatever cost."

Now it was that I believed a fight would be begun in a twinkling, and my rifle was raised, ready to do my share, when we heard the trampling of horses' hoofs in the distance.

"There is some treachery afoot," Master Howell said in a low tone. "These fellows have kept us in conversation until the remainder of the party can come up. It would be useless to oppose an overwhelming force."

"True," Master Hunter added, and then, as if seized by a sudden thought, he added in a low tone to me, who sat nearest him, "You two lads may perchance escape and carry to our companions of the association the information of our trouble. Back your horses off till you are partially screened by the trees, and then ride at full speed."

"There are four of us, and each one ready to give a good account of himself," Sidney said, much as if he was eager to take part in a fray where blood must inevitably be spilled.

"Do not stop to argue, lad. It is necessary the Regulation know that our passage is barred by some treachery of Edwards and Fanning, and you must carry the news."

I remembered what my father had said, and pulled my horse back, step by step, until he was amid the bushes that bordered the road on either side.

The strangers gave but little heed to my maneuvers, probably because they believed that a lad like me was of but little importance as compared with the deputies – I had no doubt but that they were acquainted with the purpose of Masters Howell and Hunter – and, therefore, I was soon partially screened from view.

Sidney delayed until a party of horsemen numbering four or five came into view, and then he wheeled around suddenly, riding at full speed past me as a couple of pistol balls whistled by his head.

I joined him, as may be supposed, and we rode at a sharp pace for a mile or more, when we pulled up as if by common consent.

No chase had been given, and thus was I all the more strongly convinced that these highwaymen knew full well who were acting as deputies of the Regulation.

We two lads looked at each other in silence as our horses came to a standstill, and not until perhaps a minute had passed did we speak.

"The Regulators did well to listen to such knaves as Edwards and Fanning!" Sidney said angrily. "We should have released the prisoners when it was in our power. Now the poor men will remain in jail until the brute Tryon gets tired of holding them."

"It is childish to cry over spilled milk!" I replied, angry because my comrade was inclined to give way to repinings when they could be of no avail. "It is our duty to get speech with Master Hamilton without delay."

"Yes," Sidney cried scornfully, "and while we are riding toward Maddock's Mill, where I question if any of the Regulators can be found, those scoundrels will carry our companions to some jail in which they may die before we learn of their whereabouts."

"We can only do as Master Hunter commanded," I replied meekly, realizing the truth of all Sidney had said.

"I don't count on anything of the kind; but intend to turn back."

"To what purpose?" I cried, now thoroughly alarmed, for I knew my comrade well enough to understand that he did not make such assertions without fully intending to carry out whatever plan might be in his head.

"It stands to reason that those fellows who have taken the deputies prisoners came from near about Hillsborough, in which case they will camp somewhere on the road to-night. It is not probable they count two lads as of any great importance, and will never suspect us of coming back once we get away."

"Well?" I asked, determined that he should unfold his scheme without assistance from me.

"I shall turn back, follow those fellows if possible, and try to come upon them unawares to-night, when there should be a chance to aid our friends."

"Suppose you fail?" I asked, turning over in my mind the possibilities of his being able to accomplish anything of importance.

"If I find that they are on the alert against a rescue, or if there are too many, it will yet be time to turn my horse's head toward Maddock's Mill."

CHAPTER IV

THE RESCUE

When Sidney had thus announced his purpose I asked myself what might be the chances of success, and after due reflection it appeared to me as if the possibilities were rather in his favor, because it did not seem probable the royalists would anticipate any attempt at a rescue.

They must have overheard the command given us to ride back with all speed, and could hardly suppose two lads like ourselves would take the chances of making an attack, therefore we were likely to find them off their guard.

Yes, so I decided, the scheme might be worked if we proceed cautiously, and even in case we found it impossible to do anything, the delay would be trifling, provided Sidney was willing to give over the effort if a rescue could not be brought about that same night, therefore I asked:

"Will you agree to set your horse's head toward Maddock's Mill by sunrise, in case you fail in the purpose during this night?"

"Yes, that much I promise, for I'm of the opinion that unless the work can be done before to-morrow morning there is no chance for us to carry it through without assistance."

"Then I shall do what I may toward aiding you."

He clasped me by the hand, saying as he did so:

"I knew full well you would not ride away and leave me to make the venture alone."

"I am taking no part in it save as your assistant. You are the leader, and I shall simply obey orders, because I have no head for such work, while you are a born soldier."

Sidney laughed loud and long at my words, and said when it was possible for him to speak:

"Now you are talking nonsense. If we free Masters Howell and Hunter from the governor's friends, it will simply be a case of good fortune, rather than anything deserved because of the intellect brought to bear on the matter. Let us make camp here for a time; the horses need rest and food."

"Are you not afraid that our enemies will get too much the start on us?"

"I am reckoning that we were near their camping-place when the two showed themselves. If they count on carrying our friends back to Hillsborough to give them quarters with Masters Husband and William Hunter, this road is the one they must take, and we shall see the party ride by. In case they have a comfortable halting place, I am counting that the return journey will not be begun until to-morrow morning."

I understood from this remark that Sidney had already settled all the details in his mind, and, therefore, since I refused to take any part in making his plans, there was nothing for me to do save patiently hold my tongue.

We unsaddled the horses, led them into the forest where was a small clearing covered with rich grass, and made a hearty dinner for ourselves from the contents of our haversacks.

When this was done we had nothing with which to occupy our attention, save the task of keeping watch over the highway to make certain the enemy did not pass without our knowledge.

Although I had so readily agreed to aid my comrade, I was far from feeling comfortable in mind regarding the outcome. I knew full well that even in event of success we must run many chances of losing our lives, for now that the royalists had begun to make prisoners of citizens of the Carolinas without legal warrant, they would not hesitate to take the lives of two lads who might interfere with their plans.

To risk our lives in a battle where glory might be won, was one thing; but to be killed like thieves in the night, when none of our friends would be able to say whether we died like heroes or cowards was quite another matter.

Do not let it be understood that I was regretting having agreed to the venture; on the contrary, I would have acted in the same manner had the question been put at that late moment, yet I weighed the possibilities once more, and found them less promising than when first considering the proposition.

We did not indulge in conversation to any extent during that afternoon. Now and then Sidney spoke of the treachery displayed by Master Edwards, and the possible fate of the deputies in case we failed to rescue them; but for the greater portion of the time we remained silent, each giving way, perhaps, to gloomy forebodings.

The sun was no more than an hour high when my comrade said as he rose to his feet and set off toward the clearing where the horses had been left:

"I reckon the time has come for us to make a start. We'll ride to the place where the villains met us, and then you shall take to the woods with the horses, while I follow the trail on foot."

"Why should we not boldly ride down the road until we find ourselves somewhere near their camping-place?" I asked, even after having promised myself to take no part in the plan of rescue.

"Because I'm of the opinion that we shall find the villains within half a mile or less of where we were halted, and it would be a most serious mistake to let them see us."

As he had proposed so we did, and I soon had good reason for congratulating myself that my advice was not taken.

The hoof-prints of the horses told us plainly when we were come to the scene of the encounter, and then, leading both animals, I struck into the woods, advancing slowly because of the underbrush, while my comrade pushed rapidly ahead.

The night had not yet come when Sidney returned, and as I involuntarily came to a halt he whispered:

"They are camped half a mile further on. There are six horses picketed near by, in addition to those ridden by the deputies, therefore I reckon that the odds are not heavily against us."

"Did you see our friends?"

"Yes; they are in a lean-to, tied, and guarded by the negro. We can take the horses within two hundred yards of the place, where is a good bit of grass which will keep them quiet; but it is well to wait here a couple of hours."

Once more we came to a halt, and while waiting until the time for action should come I asked Sidney to tell me how he proposed to set about the rescue.

"I shall find no fault with your plans, for you are the leader; but it is necessary I know fully your purpose, in order to play my part properly."

"We'll leave our horses hobbled, so that we may unfasten them quickly. Then, say in two hours, you and I are to creep around to where their animals are tethered. We must procure two, with saddles and bridles, and bring them to where ours are. Not till then are we to give the deputies any idea of our having disobeyed orders. We should be able to get them away safely, and a start of five minutes will be enough. The rising of the moon is to be our signal for work."

"What about the negro who is on guard?"

"Unless he is different from every other black I ever saw, he will be asleep. If not, or if one of the white men has taken his place, we must fall upon him in such a way that he can make no noise, after which a gag will do the rest."

"Where are the others?"

"In a lean-to nearer the road, and a good fifty yards from where our friends are lying."

The two hours which followed were the longest I have ever known, although since that time I have been engaged in many and more dangerous ventures. Each second seemed like a minute, and I began to think that we had been mistaken in the belief that the moon rose at ten minutes past nine o'clock. The souging of the wind through the trees sounded in my ears like a prophecy of evil, and the cry of a night-bird came to me like the shout of an enemy.

Had we been forced to remain there inactive an hour longer, I believe of a verity that the courage would have oozed out of my finger-ends entirely; but, fortunately, before I was overcome by timorousness the time for action had arrived.

Sidney led the way through the underbrush, gliding noiselessly along as if we were stalking a deer, and I copied his every movement.

In order to get at the horses we were forced to make a detour through the forest to the rear of the place where the deputies were held prisoners, and this required a good half hour of most laborious work.

Once we were there, however, it became evident that the royalists counted on beginning a journey very shortly, for the animals were not only saddled, but bridled, and we understood that the remainder of our task must be performed quickly, or it might chance that our enemies took to the road before we could warn Masters Howell and Hunter of the help which was near at hand.

Now we did not dare carry our plan to the extent of taking the animals over to where our steeds were hobbled; but fastened them by the bridles in the rear of the lean-to, and then crept cautiously forward.

It was so dark in this place, owing to the foliage, that although the moon was half an inch high, we could not distinguish objects five paces distant, and Sidney led the way by the sense of touch, rather than because of any aid from his eyes.

When we were close at the rear of the lean-to I could hear the sound of heavy breathing; but nothing more, and Sidney whispered in my ear:

"I will make my way through the brush, and you are to wait here. If I should be captured, do your best to carry the information to Maddock's Mill. Don't try to aid me."

I made up my mind on the instant that I would do my full share in a fight before leaving the brave lad to his fate, and as the thought formed itself in my mind he disappeared through the branches which went to make up the shelter.

I listened with painful intentness; but could hear no more than a faint rustling of the brush, and then a man crept slowly out into my arms.

It was Master Howell, and when I would have conducted him to where the horses were tethered, he motioned for me to remain quiet.

Another moment of most painful suspense, during which my heart beat so loudly that it seemed certain our enemies would be aroused by the noise, and then Master Hunter appeared, followed closely by Sidney.

We four crept softly to where the two horses were standing, and my comrade explained to the deputies that we must keep within the thicket until having come to where our steeds had been left.

"We had best turn in the other direction, keeping under cover until you ride by, when we can dash out," Master Howell said, and I was mystified by his words.

"But we shall not ride past here," Sidney replied in a cautious tone. "To do so would be going directly away from Maddock's Mill!"

"Our destination is Brunswick," Master Howell said, as if that was sufficient explanation.

"Brunswick!" I repeated in astonishment. "Surely you are not counting on trying to continue the journey after all that has happened?"

"Of a verity we are," Master Hunter said emphatically. "It is not in our minds to ride back with the story that we allowed ourselves to be frightened by six men after two lads have shown themselves so brave and so quick-witted. Go for your horses, and, having mounted them, ride directly out on the main road, moving cautiously until arriving opposite where these scoundrels are encamped. Then use your spurs; we will join you some distance on."

"But think of the danger which you incur!" I pleaded, although it would have been more seemly for a lad like myself to keep a silent tongue and obey orders.

"We count on presenting this petition to the governor if it be possible to arrive at Brunswick," Master Howell said sharply, and then, by way of putting an end to the conversation, the gentlemen began leading the animals back past the lean-to from which we had so lately rescued them.

There was nothing left for Sidney and I but to perform the parts assigned us, although I am certain there was much the same thought in his mind that filled mine, which was that the latter portion of this venture would be needlessly dangerous and ill-advised.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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