



“‘Courage, my friend,’ the officer said, kindly.”

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 335.)

CHAPTER XV.

WHERE could Val be? What had happened to her and to the wounded Englishman? Who had taken them away? Those were the questions that Roger asked again and again, but neither Captain Durand nor the other Frenchmen had any answer to give nor any explanation to offer.

They had gone. That was all; and Bob the sheep-dog had gone too. They had vanished—disappeared, and nothing remained but the dispatch rider's gloves and the little girl's hat to show that this was the place where they had been left.

'Val! Val! Val!' Roger shouted his sister's name again and again, his voice ringing out loudly through the trees; but an echo that repeated the word, 'Val! Val! Val!' in a faint, clear whisper was the only answer. Then a close search was made through all the thickets and gullies in the vicinity, and finally the chauffeur was dispatched with the car to go first in one direction and then in another to see if he could find any trace of the fugitives.

It was all in vain. A terrible sense of despair and failure swept over the boy, and, exhausted as he was with all the excitement and exertions of the day, he seemed to have no strength and no courage to face this new catastrophe.

'Take care of Val.' That was what his father had said; and now Val was gone, and he had been faithless to his trust.

He was roused by the touch of a hand on his shoulder, and looking up quickly, he found that Captain Durand was standing at his side. 'Courage, my friend,' the officer said, kindly; 'you must not despair, and, indeed, believe me, there is no need. Your little sister is, doubtless, quite safe. And now we must be going.'

'Going! Where? I can't go.' There was a note of defiance in Roger's voice as he sprang to his feet, but Durand took his arm in a firm grasp and led him towards the waiting car.

'You can do no good by staying here, my boy,' he said, gently. 'The little girl and the Englishman are certainly far away by this time. Let me tell you what has most likely happened. There are many of our military automobiles about. One has come this way, and has taken them on. It is more than likely that we shall overtake them on the road.'

'But she would never go. Val, I mean. I told her to wait here for me, and she promised.'

The young man smiled and shrugged his shoulders. 'Perhaps she had no choice in the matter. The dispatch rider was seriously wounded, you say. It was doubtless necessary that he should be moved as quickly as possible. And a little girl would not be left here alone.'

Roger still was unconvinced. 'But she may be somewhere near. Let me stay. I shall be all right here.' He tried to wriggle away, but Durand's hand gripped his shoulder strongly; and then the other officer, who had been waiting impatiently by the car, came forward and began to speak in a quick, angry voice.

'We must get on at once. It is necessary to be in Paris by nightfall. Enough time has been wasted over this business already.'

Roger, although he could not understand French, caught a word or two, and it was not difficult to grasp the sense of the hurried speech. 'I can't go,' he cried once more. 'I must stay here; Val—'

And then a note of sternness came into Durand's kind voice: 'We must go. You can't possibly stay behind. This gentleman is my superior officer; and remember, my friend, France is under martial law at this time and even civilians have to obey orders. Come, come, believe me everything will be all right,' he smiled again. 'And no doubt, if it were not for this loose sand, we should be able to see the wheel-marks of the automobile that took them away.'

He helped Roger into the car, got in himself, gave an order to the chauffeur, and then the engine was started and they were off once more, travelling southward this time, along the road.

Looking back upon it afterwards, Roger never could remember very much about the first part of that journey. He was given some food and drink, and then, utterly tired out, he dozed for a time with his head against Captain Durand's shoulder. Again and again during the journey a halt was made in a village or outside a lonely inn, and Captain Durand asked searching questions as to what motor-cars had passed lately; for, as he had said to Roger, he felt certain that the little girl and the wounded cyclist had been picked up and were being taken on into safety.

The officer did not tell Roger at once the result of his inquiries, in case they should after all end in disappointment; but he talked earnestly to his companion about the information that he collected. 'An automobile came this way half an hour ago, and there seems to have been a wounded man in it, besides a woman and a child. That last man I spoke to was not certain about the child, but the old woman was quite sure that she had seen it. They say that the car was driven by a man with a wide felt hat and a motor-mask.'

The grey-haired man shrugged his shoulders carelessly. He was worried and anxious to finish his journey before nightfall. The English boy and his affairs seemed, in comparison, of very small importance.

And so the long drive went on; but at last, when it was nearly dark, Durand came out of an inn where they had halted for petrol, and told his companion that all the inquiries were useless. 'It's a mistake,' he said. 'We are on the wrong track. That car I told you of stopped here only twenty minutes ago, and then went on towards Compiègne. The child in it was a boy. The inn-keeper's wife is positive on that point—a little French boy. She heard him talking to the woman, and they waited to buy some milk.'

The car had travelled about twenty miles further, through a large town, and then once more into a picturesque, thickly-wooded district, when Roger, who had been sound asleep, woke up with all his senses on the alert and full of keen anxiety about his missing little sister. 'Have you heard anything,' he demanded, 'about Val? Have they come this way?'

Captain Durand hesitated for a moment before he answered. 'I'm afraid I have no news for you, my boy,' he said. 'And it is disappointing, for I thought, until a little while ago, that we were on their tracks.'

There has been an automobile ahead of us for miles, going the same way, and the description of the people in it sounded all right. But the last person I questioned told me that the child in the car was not a girl after all, but a little boy—a French boy.

'A little boy! But that may have been Val, sir. It must have been. She was dressed as a boy, you see, and she could speak French awfully well. She had been at that school at St. Denis for ages.'

'Dressed as a boy!' Captain Durand started, for this statement put quite a new complexion upon the affair. He felt certain now that his first surmise had been correct, and that Val and the dispatch rider had been taken on by some belated tourists or wealthy refugees who were on their way southward.

Roger seized his arm and looked up into his face with bright, eager eyes. 'Of course it was them, and we must go back now to that inn—where they told you about the little boy—and find out which way they went. Quick, tell the man to turn round the car and go back.'

He leaned forward, almost as if meaning himself to give the necessary orders to the chauffeur; but the grey-haired officer, when the situation had been explained to him, resolutely refused to alter his plans and would not listen to any suggestions or appeals. They were going straight on to Paris. There must be no more delay. When Paris was reached the boy could doubtless be handed over to his friends, and then inquiries would be made in the proper quarter.

Paris! Roger caught at the word. Go to Paris, and leave Val in the lurch? Never! But when he questioned Durand, he found that the matter was settled, and that military discipline barred the way to any change or concession. The younger officer did not, even for a moment, think of opposing or disputing the wishes of his superior.

'Yes, we are going to Paris, my boy, and we ought to be there in two hours if all goes well. Later we can arrange what is to be done about your sister; but in the meantime it is our business to be patient—and to obey orders.'

It was evident that nothing would be gained by further argument, and once more Roger felt a wave of helpless despair sweeping over him. Paris was a great city, he knew that—and once there, what chance would he have of finding poor little Val again? Surely it would be possible to escape from these men, who seemed suddenly to have changed from friends into captors, and then he could make his way back to the last place where the mysterious motor-car was known to have stopped. He would doubtless be able to trace them then, for, of course, Val would be making inquiries too, and would be as anxious to rejoin him as he was to find her.

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THE COWARD.

'NO Delaroche has ever been a coward before,' taunted Marie.

Her sister, a slender, fragile child of twelve, shrank back a little, and looked at her appealingly.

'Nay, let us leave her, if she is afraid!' remarked Charles Delaroche, turning away scornfully.

The three children were members of a Cavalier family, living in a picturesque old manor-house near

the village of Naseby. Charles and Marie during their play had accidentally re-discovered the entrance to one of the secret passages with which the house abounded. They had fetched a lantern, and were going to explore it. Cicely, shrinking at the cold, damp gloom of the passage, had, as usual, incurred their biting scorn. She hastily returned to the light, and stood watching till the feeble glimmer of their lantern had died away. Then she burst into a storm of tears.

'I am a coward—it is true! I dare not face the darkness!' she moaned brokenly.

But by the time her brother and sister returned radiantly excited from their exploration, she had partially regained her self-control.

'We have discovered a way from the Manor to the woods on yonder hill,' exclaimed Charles.

'It will be a fine playground,' said his sister. 'For those who are not afraid!' she added witheringly.

Cicely drew her fragile form upright. 'You think me a coward, then?' she asked.

'You act as one!'

The child's blue eyes flashed through their tears. 'Some day you shall retract those words,' she said, with unusual spirit.

At that moment their old Nurse Bessy entered, exclaiming at the sight of the two children's clothes, which were covered with dust and cobwebs. She roundly scolded them both, and carried them off in disgrace. Charles she locked up in the library to learn a lesson from his horn-book, while she put Marie to sew some embroidery in the house-keeper's room. Cicely, left alone, mused at the window, her eyes fixed on the distant horizon.

'The guns!' she murmured. 'The guns which sounded this morning at Naseby! Another battle has been fought. Has the King's cause prospered?'

As if in answer to her question, the door was flung open, a hatless, dishevelled figure dashed in, and collapsed upon an oak settle!

Cicely was astonished at this sudden event, but to her own surprise she was not frightened. 'Father!' she exclaimed in an incredulous whisper, springing to her feet. For a moment she thought that she must be mistaken; that this could not be the dashing cavalier who had ridden away so gaily. His suit was stained from head to foot with mud, and his rapier snapped in half, while one arm hung limply at his side. 'What has happened?' she cried. 'Father! is the battle then . . . ?'

'Lost? Aye!—a crushing defeat—I am chased! The papers!' He ceased from sheer exhaustion, and lay back half-fainting.

At that moment came a thunderous knocking at the door, and a deep voice outside the window demanded admittance, 'In the name of the Parliament.'

The sound penetrated to the consciousness of the wounded man, and he raised himself, repeating, 'The papers!'

'What papers, my father?' asked the bewildered Cicely.

He took from his doublet a small packet of letters. 'All is lost if the rebels lay hand on these!' he gasped. 'They are from His Majesty—for Prince Rupert—my horse is shot—I am wounded—I can go no further!'

Cicely had grasped the situation, and snatching the packet she hid it in her dress. The knocking had ceased, for the servants had opened the door in terror.



"A hatless, dishevelled figure dashed in."

They heard a stern voice in the hall, and the tramp of feet ascending the stairway.

'Take them—to the Prince!' he whispered. 'Hide them—they must not be found! Quick! Go! Leave me!' Then he fell back in a dead faint.

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THE LEGEND OF STAVOREN.

ONCE there stood on the banks of the Zuyder Zee a proud city called Stavoren. It was a city of turrets and gates and magnificent palaces, but its glory has long since departed, and it lies buried beneath the sea.

Stavoren was the centre of much business and com-



"The Princess flung one of her rings into the sea."

merce. Its merchants were very wealthy, its ships travelled far. Their halls and gates—the legend tells us—were lined with gold; their courts and banqueting-rooms were paved with ducats, and their stairs and passages were strewn with shining dollars.

In Stavoren dwelt a vain and haughty Princess. She was selfish and greedy, and all her thoughts were given to money. Her one aim in life was to become ever richer and richer.

One day, the Princess, taking a sudden whim into her

head, sent for the captain of her largest ship. 'Go,' she said to him, 'for a rather long cruise, but do not be absent for more than a year. At the end of that time return to me with a full cargo of the best and noblest thing in the world.'

'But what, madam,' said the Captain, 'do you consider the best and noblest thing? There are so many good and beautiful things in the world! I will spare no pains to obtain for you whatever you desire. What shall it be?'

'I shall not tell you,' said the Princess, rudely. 'To one in my service a mere hint should suffice. People call you a wise man; here is a chance for you to show your wisdom. Go at once, and do my bidding.'

The Captain was greatly puzzled. 'What is the best thing in the world?' he asked himself again and again. At last he came to the conclusion that the correct answer to this question was 'Corn.' So he sailed away to Dantzic, and loaded his ship with the choicest wheat of Poland; then, without waiting until the year had expired, he returned to Stavoren. He had been absent less than six months.

The Princess received him coldly. 'Your ship, Captain,' she said, 'must be an eagle, to fly so swiftly! How have you contrived to go to Guinea, collect your treasure, and return, in so short a time?'

The Captain, brave though he was, trembled as he noted the lady's scowl. 'I have brought your Highness no gold from Guinea,' he replied respectfully. 'I bring you wheat—the very best wheat that ever was grown. What is more precious than corn?'

The Princess flew into a violent passion. 'What!' she exclaimed, 'do you mean to say that you have brought me nothing but wretched, common wheat?'

'If it is so wretched,' said the old man, 'why are we told to pray for our daily bread?'

'Fling it all into the water!' cried the Princess, now mad with rage. 'Do as I bid you instantly! I will come myself to see that the thing is done.'

The Captain hurried away, but not to obey his mistress, for he thought that to do so would be a sin. So, instead of throwing away the wheat, he called together a number of poor people, hoping that the Princess might be persuaded to give the wheat to them instead of to the sea.

But the lady, sad to say, had a very hard heart. When she saw the crowd of poor, famished people who fell on their knees and begged her to bestow the wheat upon them, her only answer was a shake of the head. Again she told the Captain to carry out her orders.

And now his anger flamed up. Standing boldly before his mistress, in the hearing of all the people he warned her that should she do this wicked action, the day might come when she would be glad to pick up in the streets any grain of corn that she could find.

How loudly the Princess laughed at that! 'What nonsense!' she said. 'That day will never come. Stavoren's richest inhabitant will never want for food. See! I will fling this ring into the water. Should it ever return to me, then I might one day be a beggar; the one thing is as likely—or rather, as unlikely—as the other.'

With that, the Princess flung one of her numerous rings into the sea, and little she thought ever to see it again. The wheat also was thrown into the water. And in the evening of that day (says the old story) the lady's cook found the ring inside a fish!

That very night, too, the Princess heard that all her

richly-laden ships had foundered in a storm. And as day after day went by, more and more bad news came. A bank, in which the Princess had much money, failed; Moors and Turks united to rob her. Misfortune followed misfortune, until at last the good old Captain's words 'came true,' and the once wealthy Princess was forced to beg her bread from door to door. She died in poverty.

And still the city of Stavoren, whose inhabitants heeded not the warning, was gay and glittering as ever. Hard and selfish, proud and greedy, were the hearts of the citizens, as had been the heart of the ill-fated Princess, and they, too, were punished.

A sandbank appeared on the spot where the wheat had been flung into the sea. This was called 'The Lady's Sands,' and from it shot up a meagre, straggling plant, resembling wheat in stalk and head, but bearing no fruit. Higher and higher uprose the sandbank, until it blocked up the harbour, so that no ship could enter. Yet still men seemed not to care.

Then, one dreadful night, the sea, forcing its way into a new channel, swept over the doomed city. And ever since that night, there has been no Stavoren on the shore of the Zuyder Zee, though a diver might find it at the bottom.

E. D.

THE TRAP-BREAKERS.

By HAROLD BINDLOSS.

(Continued from page 330.)

THE sloop's small dory lay high and dry, and they had some trouble to carry her down. Then the surf washed her back upon the boulders, and while Jake with an oar held her bows to the sea, Dawson pushed astern. He was wet to the waist before he got on board, and it afterwards cost them an effort to reach the sloop. When they ran alongside, her cable jarred as she punned her bows in the swell; blocks and hal-yards rattled, and the heavy boom had got loose and lurched about. It was now quite dark, and cold spray whipped their faces as they shortened cable. The chain came in slowly, bruising their hands, and they were breathless when Jake wound a turn across the bits. 'We must get some sail up and break out the anchor when she's under way,' he said.

The mainsail looked dangerously big as it thrashed in the freshening wind. They knew they ought to haul down a reef to reduce its size, but doubted if there was time, and since the wind was fair they need not set the sail properly.

'Hoist the jib and then stand by the cable. You'll want to hustle when she sails out the anchor,' Jake said as he took the helm.

Dawson set the banging jib, and then braced himself for an effort. They were not strong enough to tear the anchor from the ground, and the boat must help. She listed down with a jerk that nearly threw Dawson off his feet, and then, while the water boiled across her lee deck, forged ahead, jarring at the cable. It held her for some moments, and then slackened, and Dawson knew he must get it in before the anchor took hold again. He tore the skin from his knuckles while he knelt at the bow with the jib beating his shoulders. Jake shouted something about not being able to hold her head to wind, but Dawson hardly heard him as he struggled with the chain.

She fell off, her sails filled, and the bows swung round. The water leaped up in a white turmoil, and she swayed down until Dawson heard it wash against the low cabin-top. A little more, and she would capsize; but he could not get in the chain. The anchor was under her fore-foot, jammed against her keel, and, making the cable fast, he jumped into the cockpit. She lifted nearly upright and leaped forward into the dark when Jake, with his back against the tiller, got her before the wind. 'We're surely hitting up the pace,' he said. 'If she doesn't roll over, we won't be long in making False Point.'

Dawson thought a capsize was possible. Now she was before the wind, she rolled violently, swinging up the boom, while the half-set sail it extended soared like a slack balloon. If spar and canvas lurched across, the savage jerk might snap the mast, and he doubted if Jake could keep her straight enough to avoid this risk. Besides, a nasty sea ran behind her, and the dory they had not had time to drag on board came up on the rollers' crests and hit the stern. Still speed was needed, he did not think they could shorten sail, and they let her run.

The water got smoother when they drove round a point, and Dawson, looking forward, saw three or four boats ahead. The boats had no sail hoisted, and their crews were obviously rowing to windward under the lee of the point. The wind, however, blew strong across the low neck of land. 'The trap-breakers!' he shouted. 'They don't mean to let us pass.'

Two of the boats changed their course, and Dawson noted others he had not seen at first. It did not look as if they could get through, and he turned to Jake, who stood with body stiffly braced against the helm.

'If we had proper canvas set, I'd close-haul her and dodge them,' Jake remarked. 'Now we can only run before it.'

Dawson looked at the boats and his heart beat, but he pulled himself together. 'Very well,' he said; 'we'll let her run.'

She drove on, while two boats pulled across her course. It looked as if she would smash and press them down, but there were bold and skilful men on board. They obviously meant to stop the sloop, although Dawson did not think they would risk the shock of a collision. One boat waited, a little to starboard, another a little to port, and Jake headed for the narrow gap.

A man stood up in the nearest craft and a boathook with a rope attached caught the sloop's channels. The wire shrouds rang, there was a heavy crash, and Dawson saw the boat, half-buried in foam, dragged along against the quarter. The sea was breaking into her, but in another moment the men would jump on board.

'Stand by main sheet!' Jake shouted. 'Check it as the sail comes across, and then let it run.'

Dawson seized the wet rope, knowing the risk Jake meant to take, and the big, dark mainsail began to swing. It had been on the opposite side from the boat, but now it was nearly amidships, and the heavy boom along its foot went up. Dawson got in a yard of rope to ease the coming shock, and wondered whether the mast would break off. Then there was a violent lurch and crash. The sheet screamed round a pin and burned his hands. Sail and boom swung over, and the sloop, rolling with them, ground upon the boat: but the heavy spar and swelling canvas had struck her first. One

could not see what had happened, but the sloop's mast stood, and next moment a rope parted with a bang and the boat dropped astern.

Jake gasped, and wiped the sweat from his face. 'I guess that crowd has had enough,' he said. 'If anybody got knocked into the water, the other lot can pick him up. We certainly took some chances, but the trap-breakers got the smash.'

The other boat was close by, but perhaps her crew were daunted, for they did not try to hook on, and in a few moments the boys were alone in the dark. Dawson breathed a deep breath of relief. The rest of the job was easy; they must keep her running until they met the patrol.

After a time, the indistinct shape of a small steamer loomed up at the mouth of a bay, and when Jake put down his helm the sloop listed over until her deck was in the sea. With a savage thrashing of canvas she came round head to wind, and the boys had a breathless struggle to haul the mainsail down. Then as she ran past the patrol-boat under her jib Jake waved his arms.

'The trap-breakers are landing at Gardner's beach!' he shouted.

'Run in behind the point and wait,' a man on the slanted bridge replied; and the steamer turned and followed the sloop.

When the boys had stowed the sails and got the anchor down in smooth water, a boat came alongside, and a man in oilskins jumped on board. 'Now, what's this about the trap-breakers?' he asked.

They told him, and he nodded. 'I've got it; looks as if we had better hustle. We can't tow your boat back—we'd pull her under. Jump on board if you want to come.'

As soon as they were in the boat the crew pushed off, and a few minutes afterwards the steamer drove her bows into the rising sea as she went off at full speed.

In the meantime, Ah Lee found Mr. Winthrop and Gardner at the shore end of the nets.

'You told the boys?' said Winthrop, when he had heard the Chinaman's story. 'Where are they now?'

Ah Lee said they went on board the sloop, and Gardner exclaimed, 'Gone? Well, I didn't reckon they'd light out like that!'

Winthrop laughed. 'You don't know the boys yet. They didn't go because they were scared.'

'Go quick; bling patrol boat,' Ah Lee explained.

'I'm sorry,' Gardner said to Winthrop, and turned to Ah Lee. 'Why didn't you tell us this before?' Then he resumed in a thoughtful tone: 'Looks as if we'll have trouble to stand off the crowd that's coming until Wheeler arrives. Anyhow, they're not going to break my traps while I'm around.'

He sent Ah Lee for the men, and for a time they were busy with tackles, heaving tight a wire rope that ran from a buoy outside the nets to a rock on the beach. Much of the rope was in the water, a foot or two beneath the surface, but near the shore it showed indistinctly now and then when the rollers broke.

'That will stop them some,' Gardner remarked grimly, when he was satisfied. 'Pretty hard to see in the dark, and I allow they'll have trouble if a boat gets on top of it.'

(Concluded on page 346.)



"The two boats pulled across her course."