MY LADY OF ORANGE.

By H. C. BAILEY.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAYS OF DESERTERS.

"Sir, this is a day of good tidings!" It was the little Burgomaster came tiptoeing into our room ere we had sat. "Sir, this is a day of good tidings. God has been very gracious unto us!" The poor man was breathless in his hurry, but he carried his head very high now; quite other was he than the hesitating fool of the day before.

"And to you we owe much," he went on. "All has fallen out as you said. Breuthe will never forget who made the plan that saved her; and truly, sir, in some sense I owe you an amend. I confess that yesterday I doubted your wisdom. I was wrong, sir."

"Do not speak of it," said I. He bowed.

"We must send a message to the Prince, sir. I think every horse in the town is yours."

"Yes; we shall not have to eat them now," said I. "I will provide a messenger; and for the present—pardon me, but we were on the walls all night."

"You shall not have cause to call us ungrateful, sir," he said. "I bid you farewell."

Gaspar had said nothing since we entered the house, and he listened to the little Burgomaster without a smile. Even after the Burgomaster had gone he sat staring at the table. At last he sprang up.

"The little man is right, Captain," he cried. "I was wrong again. I ask your pardon. I doubted you yesterday, too. We have fought together nearly ten years. I had less excuse, Captain, after this I would follow you to hell."

I put my hand in his. Better soldier or truer friend than Gaspar never walked this earth. How much of the credit for saving Breuthe belongs to him you know who have read this tale. How much he has done for me I think no one can ever know.

There in that little room I took up a pen:

"What shall I say, Gaspar?"

"'Breuthe is safe; no es nada!' quoth Gaspar.

"I have the honor to inform your Highness that the siege of Breuthe is raised.

JOHN NEWSTEAD."

I said as I wrote the words, "Who shall we send?"

"Gott! Send Vermeil. He will like the job," grunted Gaspar. And so it was done; we sent Vermeil and we went to bed.

Late in the next day came great news; a courier came to the town with letters for the Burgomaster and St. Trond, telling how Alkmaar had opened its gates and declared for Orange. These were the first fruits of the long siege of Breuthe. If a tiny town could hold out so long, a larger might hold out longer; so they thought in Alkmaar ere they heard of the raising of Breuthe's siege. Tidings of that would scarce make them more disposed to surrender. So Breuthe was very joyful, and only a few men who knew that Alkmaar would provoke all Alva's strength, who knew how strong Alva was and who remembered that the force before Breuthe would now be added to the others marching on Alkmaar under Don Frederico, Alva's son—only these few looked grave!

"Ach! why could they not wait for the winter!" grunted Gaspar. "Then would be the time to take sides, when troops cannot move!"

So he said, and so I thought, too, while the people of Breuthe sung psalms of thanksgiving. You shall see which of us were right.

Vermeil came back with answers from Orange loud in praise of us all, that bade us send an escort to Delft and he would come to thank us himself. But the next day came some one with tidings of greater moment, a German deserter from Alva's force. The Burgomaster came bustling round to tell us and bid us to a council at his house. Gaspar was just to start with the escort for Orange as he came, and so I went along.

Laurenz de St. Trond was there. I had not spoken to him since the morning after the fight in the marketplace.

"And so, sir, good has come of the crime after all?" said I, as I entered. He looked at me gravely.

"A crime is not less a crime because it is successful—or profitable," he said, slowly. The Burgomaster had gone to bid his servants bring wine, and we were alone.

"And yet I was right," I answered; "it was the only way."

"You have raised the siege of Breuthe. Yes. You are a better soldier, sir, than I. Perhaps it is not for me to judge you, but I would rather have been one of those men you betrayed to their death than you."

I stared at him; this was another tale from the Burgomaster! My plan had succeeded, and the Burgomaster talked of the grace of God, but St. Trond liked it none the better for that. Well, I am no saint—you have found that out by now—but I did not feel inclined to boast to St. Trond any more.

The Burgomaster came back with his wine.

"Gentlemen, the information is this," he began solemnly. "Alva is marching with all his force on Alkmaar!"

"I could have told that,' said I, sipping the wine.

"He is marching by Herpt and Haring."

I put the wine down.

"Ah! this is the deserter's tale," said I.

"The question to decide is what action we are to take," quoth St. Trond. I stared at him.

"What action? Why, none," I cried.

"Men from all quarters are gathering to Alkmaar," said he. "It is said there will soon be 14,000 men in the lines."

"Probably more," said I.

"Still you advise us to do nothing?" said St. Trond quickly.

"Cordieu! yes; because we can do nothing. Alva has 3,000 still. We cannot make a thousand to march. The risk is too great. And what should we gain if we won? If we lost we'd bring him back here."

"But how will Alkmaar fare?" cried the Burgomaster.

"Charity begins at home," I said drily.

St. Trond's eyes flashed.

"You were ready enough to fight men in a trap," he answered scornfully.

"I am ready enough to fight when aught can be gained," said I.

"I wonder if you ever fought without thinking of yourself?" St. Trond said.

"I fight for the man who pays me!" quoth I.

St. Trond looked at me sadly and so fixedly that my eyes fell and then he began to speak softly as if we were alone.

"There was a man went into Alva's camp, and one thing that made him go was the wish to save a girl of whom he knew little, because he fancied he had failed in his duty to her before, and there was a man took money from those he led to their death, will you tell me which man is giving counsel now?"

"Cordieu! both," I cried. "I had to pay my men—let that pass. What do you want to do?"

"I want to attack Alva!" said he.

"Heaven above us! Where? How? With what force?"

"Between Herpt and Haring. With those who will follow me."

"I should guess they will be few. So you take Alva's route on the word of a deserter?"

"Is he the only deserter we have trusted in Breuthe?" he asked. Aye, it was a fair thrust, and I did not gainsay him.

"Then you will go, in spite of all?" I cried.

"If the men of Breuthe will follow me."

He rose and went out, and left the Burgomaster and me looking at each other.

"Indeed, sir, I think the Seigneur de St. Trond spoke harshly more than once——" began the Burgomaster.

"He is going to destruction," I said sharply. "Will he get men to follow him?"

"There are men in Breuthe—many a one—would follow anywhere he led," said the Burgomaster. "Do you think, sir, there is no chance of success?"

"Chance? There may be a chance. But the risk, man, the risk!" said I. "What in the devil's name made Alkmaar rise when Alva's forces lay all around it?"

"Sir, it is better to die for a faith and die free than live under Alva and the Inquisition," said Burgomaster, quietly.

I sat silent, playing with the wine glass. A man does not like to find others braver than himself. Yet why risk so much for a town that chose to rise at an ill moment? The cause of Alkmaar was the cause of Orange, and I was a soldier of Orange. Aye, a soldier, and it was not war to risk my men on a bare chance. But St. Trond seemed still there with his steady eyes, and there was something grand about the man ready to throw his life away for the sake of those fools in Alkmaar. Fools? Were they fools? I had done what no man in Breuthe could do—turn the town out of Alva's grasp, and yet more than once before St. Trond, aye, even before the Burgomaster, I had felt myself ashamed because my thoughts were not like theirs. Is a man a fool because he does not always follow his brain? Such were the thoughts that ran in my head as I sat in that wainscoted room, with the empty wineglass in my fingers, and I sat there long while the little Burgomaster watched me in silence. At last he left me, and I still sat thinking.

Suddenly the door opened and Gabrielle de St. Trond came in. I turned and she drew back.

"I thought I thought the Burgomaster was here," she said.

"Your father and he have both been here and gone."

She took a step forward.

"You—do you know where my father has gone? I saw him march out of the gate. Where is he going"

"He is going to attack Alva!"

"To attack Alva? With so few men?"

"With all the men who would follow him," said I.

"You—you would not?"

"I would not."

"I might have known. I might have known," she cried. "You. Oh, you can be cruel to the helpless! You can even fight, if your pay is large enough! But to fight fairly, only for the cause—no, you will not risk that! You would rather see others go to their death."

"It was not with my good will he went," said I.

"You thought it too dangerous?" I bowed. She laughed shortly.

"If you take me for a coward, remember I went into Alva's camp," I cried in anger.

"I wish I could forget," she said softly, and I saw the blue of her eyes grow darker behind the tears.

Yes, I had been thinking hours, and the end of my thoughts had come. I looked at the drooping head, and I rose and went out silently.

I hurried through the streets and found a trumpeter.

"Sound boot and saddle!" I cried.

The men came grumbling into the market place, but ready enough to fight; a little success goes far.

"Where's Vermeil?" I asked Zouch when we were mustered.

"Went with the burghers, Captain!" said he.

"With the burghers? Vermeil with the burghers?"

"Aye, oil and vinegar, eh, Captain."

CHAPTER IX.

HIRELINGS' BATTLES.

The day was far gone when we set out, and we trotted quickly along the level road through the cool fragrant air, with the shadows lengthening beside us. A little on the flank I rode alone, for indeed I had much in my mind. Where we should find St. Trond, where we should find Alva, what we should do when we found either, none of these things I knew. Surely never did soldiers march on an errand as unknown as this. Why had I come? I knew, though I would scarce confess it, even to myself; it was because Laurenz de St. Trond thought me a cowardly knave. It was because I sought to save the men he had taken with him; it was because we had a chance to hurt Alva, it was for anything but because a girl had cried. What was it she said? She wished she could forget I had come to Alva's camp. She did not forget, then? Nay, I could not forget it either. But she, who thought me a murderer, half a traitor, money-seeking, cruel, yet remembered that I had saved her. I thought of how she had looked at me, how her head had nestled on my shoulder ere she knew all that I had gone to do and all that I had done in that camp. Oh, laugh if you will; I did not repent. I do not repent now, of the way I saved Breuthe. Judge the deed altogether, think of the end as well as the means, and say was I wrong? But was she wrong either? I had fought for Alva more years than one; is it likely I was a better man than she fancied?

It grew dark, and still we pushed on. St. Trond's men would have marched well, for though they had many hours' start of us we were mounted and they on foot, and yet we had to halt, and water and rest our horses without finding them. I would have marched again almost at once, but Zouch came grumbling up.

"I don't know what you want, Captain, but 'tis little use catching Alva if we founder the horses to do it."

So we halted for two hours, and I lay wrapped in my cloak, sleepless, watching the stars.

Morning dawned over the plain red and clear, and at last, away to our right we saw a cloud of dust moving quickly. The sun rose higher in the sky, and now there was another and bigger cloud farther off than the first. We began to trot faster.

"Curse it, there's no cover," I muttered.

"What's he trying for?" Zouch asked.

"Who, St. Trond? How should I know?" I said angrily.

"Ought to have some one with him to tell him what to do, I reckon," Zouch growled.

"Are we not with him," said I, sharply.

"Humph! he's there, we're here."

Alva's line went straggling thin and long and St. Trond still marched on its flank.

"Cordieu! think they are both fools together," I cried. "Why not—ah!"

Oh! it was the chance—the chance of a lifetime. Had I but been with St. Trond! Had I but been a mile nearer! Two wagons broke down across the road, and the rearguard halted perforce, but the van knew nothing of it till it came to the place, and for a moment right in the middle of Alva's force there gaped a hole. Had I but gone with St. Trond at first.

St. Trond hesitated; he was not a soldier by trade, and to plunge into the middle of Alva's men was a thing he would not do without thought. He hesitated, and the chance was gone; the van turned and closed again, and then—then, when they were all ready for him St. Trond flung his men at the Spaniards.

I can guess how Alva looked; I can see the cold, sneering smile come over his lips. I can hear the harsh orders. It was a task after Alva's own heart to crush 600 men with 3,000. St. Trond's pikemen charged—they charged well, I will not gainsay that—and Alva gave back a little before the charge. Little by little his centre fell back, and little by little the wings advanced, slowly the circle closed round St. Trond. Alva was to have his revenge for the market place and he sat there (many times have I seen the like), sat quietly, slowly stroking his long thin beard, with the pupils of his eyes growing bigger, and his lips bent in a cruel smiling curve.

It was well planned, and carried out as well. But one thing he forgot, and that was the horsemen I led. He should have seen us sooner; perhaps he did, and yet could not guess what we were. For, indeed, it is strange design to march with pikemen two miles in front of their cavalry. Whether he saw us or not, we set on him.

"Charge!" I shouted. "Charge! Vivent les gueux!"

"Vivent les gueux!" the men shouted in answer, and, with the watery of the Netherlands thundering on before us, we swept down on Alva's wing. They tried to strengthen it, but the time for that had gone by, and ere any support had come we had crashed down on their flank, and were breaking through to where St. Trond's pikemen rolled like a hedgehog in the midst. We were through.

"Break out, break out on your right flank!" I shouted to St. Trond as we turned our horses and rode back again, cutting down the broken ranks as we passed. The pikemen fought their way through, unbroken yet; the jaws of Alva's trap had closed in vain.

"Fall back, back to the higher ground," grunted Zouch. The fight was not over yet. Alva would not give up his prey without a struggle, and his horsemen were waiting for a chance to charge. They never found it. While they changed ground to try and draw us away, we galloped down toward Alva again, and, thinking their time had come, they started toward our pikemen. Suddenly in the midst of our charge, I swung the men round to the left, and we took those hapless Spanish troopers in flank, and cut through them as a tight string cuts through cheese. So we came around to St. Trond, and the Spaniards fell back and formed again behind their foot.

"You will fall back on the town?" asked St. Trond as I came up. "We have lost very many."

"Aye, but not too fast," said I. Though, indeed, the Spaniards did not threaten more. "We came out 600 strong, and we are little more than four now," quoth St. Trond. "And you?"

"Oh, we have lost some," said I.

Just then Vermeil came up.

"You did not grudge me to the burghers, Captain?" quoth he.

"Cordieu! no; but you might have kept them out of this mess."

"I was not in command," said Vermeil; "I was not in command."

Slowly we fell back on Breuthe, smaller, gloomier companies than had gone out the day before. I rode alone still. I could not be with St. Trond, for I knew now that if I had listened to him we might have broken all Alva's force. If we had only been together when the chance came! Had I thought less of the risk, and more of the cause to which I owed service, we might have struck a great blow that would have set St. Trond had been right to sneer, after all, since I could not fight without thinking of myself. You may guess how proud I felt as we rode along the sandy paths. What was that question I asked myself yesterday? "Is a man a fool because he does not always follow his brain?" Well, it was the question a man was a fool if he followed nothing else. There are not many times in my life when I feel worthless and mean, but here was one, at least—cordieu! here was one.

St. Trond, too, rode silent and apart, and when I looked covertly at him once or twice I saw his face was very grave and sad. At last he spurred his horse over to me.

"I was wrong, sir, and you were right. Will you let me take my words back? I have thrown away 200 lives that I might have saved if I had believed you. But for your skill and courage I should have lost all I cared for dear, and that I said to you, may I hope that you can forgive it?"

"In God's name, say no more." I cried. "Why talk of forgiveness from me to you?"

"I admit, sir, I was in the wrong. I cannot do more."

"You were in the right," I said sharply. "I ought to have come with you. What is the use of words now?"

"It was, indeed, a task too great for me," he answered sadly and moved away. You may guess that "as not what I meant my words to say. There is nothing stirs me more than praise when my deserts are blame. At last, when it was growing dark, we came to Breuthe, and there gathered around us a pale, eager, trembling crowd to learn that 200 men—their husbands, their brothers, their sons—who marched out yesterday lay stiff and cold on the plain now. St. Trond rode slowly through the throng, with his hat pulled down over his brows, and they fell back in silence, with angry looks, to let him pass. Then when I came a little after they called down blessings on my head. Such was the justice of Breuthe.

"Has the Prince come?" I asked the Burgomaster.

"No, sir; not yet."

"Strange, cordieu; strange. Vermeil, is it not?"

"He may not ride quickly, Captain."

"He has had a full day," I answered.

"We broke the bridge at Veermut."

But the hours went by and still the Prince and Gaspar came not, and the moon was out ere there came a thunder at the main gate and a cry.

"Teufel! Are you all asleep?"

"Who are you?" cried the guard.

"Ach! I am the bodyguard of the Prince of Orange."

The gate was flung open and there came in William of Orange, riding a jaded horse, and walking at his side, holding by the stirrup leather, Gaspar Wiederman, covered with dust and splashed with blood.

The guard ran forward, crying anxiously:

"Your Highness is safe?"

"Thanks to this gentleman, I am safe and alive in Breuthe," quoth the Prince with a smile.

I came running up bareheaded, roused by the noise.

"You were attacked, Gaspar?" I cried.

"Are I? You think I walk for pleasure?"

"Shut the gate, knaves" I said, for the fools had left it open.

"There is no need," said the Prince calmly. "There are no pursuers."

"Teufel! there are none to pursue," grunted Gaspar.

The Prince smiled and dismounted.

"And it is you, sir, I have to thank for saving the town," he said, holding out his hand to me. "I little thought I had made so good a bargain when you came to Delft. Your despatch was something of the shortest, but the news needed no phrases to set it off. I fear I have left your escort behind me. They fought bravely, sir, and few of those that beset us live to tell the tale——"

"Ach! none by now," grunted Gaspar.

"Where were you attacked, your Highness?" I cried.

"They—Alva—had laid an ambush by the river at Veermut to attack us as we crossed. Your men held them in play while my horse swam the stream. Even then but for your Lieutenant I should have been in ill straits. Your men were outnumbered, and four Spaniards crossed the river after me. My friend here had lost his horse, but he swam across alone. My pistols served for two, his sword for the others. I know not how many that sword had slain before."

"Four, I think—or five," said Gaspar, solemnly. "It was twenty to fifty, Captain. A good fight."

"If all your men fight as well," said the Prince, "it is not a regiment you brought me at Delft, but an army. Even Cornput will believe you are worthy now."

"Oh, we fight, some of us," grunted Gaspar.

St. Trond came hurrying up.

"Your Highness," he broke out, "I come——"

"Ah, Laurenz, my friend," said the Prince gayly; "and so you have a virgin city back."

"If the town is safe, it is not I who saved it," answered St. Trond slowly. "And this day I have lost 200 men through my folly. I went out to attack Alva with 600 burghers against the advice of better men than I. I brought back only 400, and had it not been for Master Newstead here, who risked himself and his men to save me and mine, not one of us had come back to the town. I was unequal to the task you gave me."

The Prince looked at him sadly and kindly.

"Laurenz, Laurenz, have you forgotten my campaign against Alva?" he said. "I was worse beaten than you, for I had no army left at all."

"If I had been willing to go with the Seigneur de St. Trond at first," I cried, "it might have been a victory."

"Indeed, gentlemen, it seems to me you have done very well. Once I had all but given up hope for the town itself. For the 200 I set I am sorry—I am sorry," he repeated slowly, "but you will not make me believe it was the fault of either of you."

But I knew—by Heaven, I knew!

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GARDEN.

Two days afterward, or more it may be, I was in the Burgomaster's garden. The name was a mockery. While the siege still lasted anything that men could bring there—food or drink—was too precious to be left, and so all over the trim square beds the brown earth lay bare alike of flowers or leaves. There was food in the city now; grain that Alva could not wring from the peasantry poured in freely for us, and the burghers knew what a meal meant again. But, away across the flat lands, Alkmaar was passing into the trouble Breuthe had lately known. There were 10,000 men before it now, and there might have been 3,000 less. With that thought in my head, I was pacing up and down the garden.

Gabrielle came out of the house; she put her hand up to her eyes to look through the sunlight, standing there by the door, a slim figure clad all in white. I watched her—I could not help watching her—but when she came toward me I turned away. But her steps made straight for me, and I turned again to meet her.

"I have not seen you since," she said, not looking at my face. "I have come to ask you—to tell you how sorry I am."

"For what?" said I—though, indeed, I knew.

"For—for what I said. O, how it must have hurt you!"

"I deserved it."

"No, no; I thought you meant to let my father go, and——"

"And I did."

"But you went!" she cried.

"Do you know that if I had gone at first, if I had not thought of my own safety, we could have crushed Alva? If we had stuck together there was the moment when his fate lay in our hands. If your blame stung then, how much do you think your words sting now?"

"But, you saved my father——"

"It was my fault he was in danger."

"He said—you were right—you were wiser—if he had listened——"

"Wiser!" said I, with a bitter laugh.

"If he had listened to you," she persisted, "he would not have lost the men."

"I was wrong," I said; "he was right. I say it is not that the last word?"

She looked up then straight into my eyes and I saw that her face was flushed a little and her eyes bright.

"No," she answered. "I was wrong, too."

"O, will you not let it end here?" I cried.

"I called you—coward! Words! At least that was wrong," she said plaintively.

"You had good excuse," I answered.

"But it—if you are a coward, and if it was wise to go, and you are not wise, why did you go after all?" she asked, with a little smile. I did not answer for a little, and her eyes grew brighter while I stood silent, till at last I looked at her straight and said:

"If you remember so well as you said then perhaps you remember what you did before we parted."

"I cried," she said under her breath.

"Yes, you cried."

"Well?"

"And I rode after your father," said I; and she had no answer ready.

"I do not understand," she said at last. "Sometimes you seem to be heartless and sometimes you think of things—little things—and they make very much difference. You are not always the same man."

"There are few of us all black," said I. "I do not claim to be better than the rest," I said under no false colors. "I have fought for Alva once. What sort of a school is that, think you?"

"Why did you leave him?" she asked quickly.

"He did not pay the men."

"Will you get paid now?"

"Yes; Breuthe has offered, for one source of money."

"But you did not know that when you chose Orange?"

"No," said I.

"You do not flatter yourself," she said, and a smile hung round her lips and passed away. "Why do you try to make me think the worst of you?" She put out her hands with a little imploring gesture. "Why will you show me all the black and nothing else?"

I looked down into her face and I took her hands in mine.

"I will tell you why," I said quietly. "It is because I put you too high to try and cheat you. If you think me a better man than I am, I shall feel I have wronged you. I would have you know the worst, because then I can dare to ask you, if I cheated you I should not dare to ask you if there is any hope, if there is any chance you could ever love me."

"Are you showing me the worst side?" she said softly.

"Is that all your answer?" I cried and started back.

"Well, but you said you would show me the worst side, and I want to know," she answered.

"It is true," I said.

"But it might be the best then," she said, looking up at me.

"Gabrielle, do not play with me!" I cried.

"Ah! but which side of me would you like to see?"

"I know they are all alike," said I.

"Are you sure?" she asked, giving her air a touch.

"All I have seen."

"Yes, but you are so fond of black sides."

"Oh, Gabrielle, will you answer?"

"You have forgotten."

"What?"

"You didn't ask anything; you only said things."

"Then I ask now——"

"Wait a minute. You forget a lot of things. You forget how I was in that—that camp." She grew pale and shuddered. "And then you came and you—you—bought me," she said softly.

"And then?" I cried.

"That is all," she answered, and she stood with her head drooping a little.

"Then—then—Gabrielle!" I cried and my arms were round her, and she gave herself up to me as I caught her to my breast; her smiling face, with wet blue eyes, was lifted to mine, and I kissed her.

In the gray stone walls of the garden a wide seat is hewn out, and there we sat together, she on the arm, I—hand in hand.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Gabrielle at last.

"I am thinking of you; and wondering——" said I.

"Wondering at me," she cried.

"When I know what you think of me——"

"Do you know?" she asked with a roguish smile. "Oh, yes, I know what you will say. In the market place I called you cruel; but then you were trying to prove you were right. And now you have been so eager to show me the black side—do you know which side I have seen?"

She paused and looked into my face, and I kissed her again.

"I thought it was only because you cared nothing for the Spaniards. I know now, I know now," she said. "You came into Breuthe because—because I laughed; and you went out again because I cried. Do you wonder now?"

There was no need for more words, and we sat there together on the old stone seat in the bare, brown garden, while the thin shadows of the leafless trees passed round and grew longer as the sun waned toward the west.

At last when the sun was down behind the house, Gabrielle rose with a start.

"I must be very late!" she cried. "I must go. Good-by! No, I must go; not you."

I followed her in with my eyes, and sat down on the seat again. Then down the path from the house came Vermeil.

"Pretty girl, Captain," he said, with half a smile.

I looked at him idly, without thinking what he said.

"You seem rather dull. Too lonely, eh," he asked with a sneer on his lips.

I walked away.

To be continued.

THE JUMPING UMPIRE

And the Trick That Caused the Lightfoot Lilies to Lose the Championship.

"Say, you know that daffy dance that makes a guy jiggle up and down like a rubber ball in its last bounces, while his features twitch a rag-time accompaniment at right angles? The invitus dance, or something like that?" The fat ex-mascot of the Lightfoot Lilies looked inquiringly at his friends.

"Why, you mean the St. Vitus dance," one of them ventured.

"Is that it? Well, this St. Vitus may have been a good man and a graceful dancer, but any time I want to trip the light fantastic just give me an old-fashioned waltz or something with a glide in it for mine. I once knew a baseball umpire that was proficient at his step. The Ringtail Roarers brought him down to the championship game at Lily Park one year when it was their turn to furnish the umpire. Say, you ought to have seen him as he stuttered out to take his place behind the bat. I'd be willing to back him odds-on against St. Vitus at his own dance and concede thirty twitches to the minute at that. But we could have stood for his dancing all right if he hadn't gummed the game the way he did. How? You couldn't guess in a rich uncle's lifetime. It was like this:

"Capt. Priest of the Rearers won the toss and chose outs. For us Sammie Salmon dropped a neat little single back of third. Then the trouble began. Their third baseman tossed the ball over to first, and the first baseman clapped it on to Sammie, who by this time was anchored fast to the bag.

"'How's that, Mr. Umpire?' shouted the first baseman.

"The umpire was still jumping up and down in the ecstacies of his saintly dance. 'You're—you're—you're—outatfirst,' he spluttered, with a convulsive wave of his hand.

"'What?' Sammie Salmon demanded, indignantly. 'Out? Why, I've never left the base.'

"But in those days, you know, what the umpire said went, and there was nothing for Sammie to do but slink back to the bench and keep his troubles to himself. The same thing happened when Bull Thompson drew his base on balls. While he was standing on the bag the first baseman held the ball against his arm and again appealed to the umpire. Same result. Two men sitting on the bench with troubles of their own. Then came Capt. Slugger Burrows. First on dead ball; stood on first with both feet; touched by first baseman, and side declared out by the saintly dance guy. That was more than we could stand. Slugger Burrows threatened to take his team off the field, and it was only by the strongest kind of argument that Cy Priest succeeded in persuading him to finish out the inning.

"Matters were finally adjusted and the Roarers took the bat. The first two men up died easy deaths on infield pop flies. We began to have some hopes of a tie game in spite of the jiggling umpire. Then Cy Priest toed the rubber. He drove the first pill out of the box down between second and short, and reached first with a whole clock full of time to spare. Foote tossed the ball over to first just as a matter of form, when 'What's the trouble with the Lightfoot rooters' began to ask one another, 'is that spluttering umpire contagious?' All at once Capt. Slugger Burrows at short burst out laughing. It seemed rather cruel to us to find merriment in the affliction of a rival. We didn't think it of the slugger.

"'What, aren't you guys next?' he asked when the side was finally retired. 'You see the way that umpire jumps around? Well, that's a disease, he can't help it. What's more he doesn't even know it. Ha, ha, ha. We were utterly disgusted with his heartless laughter. 'Don't you see it yet?' he asked when he had partly recovered. 'His imperfect there watches the runner instead of the base. He thinks he's standing still and that it's the runner that's doing the jumping. He thinks we were all touched out while we were jumping in the air. The only way to make him think you're standing still is to jump up and down with him the way Cy Priest did. Don't you see it now?'

"Now what do you think of that? And the Slugger was right. We found that by jumping up and down with the St. Vitus umpire he thought we were literally on the level and consequently called us safe. We, by the sixth inning, when this thing had become second nature, and the eighteen players of both teams were springing up and down like so many dyspeptic grasshoppers. Even the spectators seemed to catch the spirit of the thing. Men, women and children were jumping round in a way that at one time threatened destruction to the grandstands. 'Humph,' grunted the umpire when the thing was at its height, 'I knew they'd get tired of their infernal jumping and have to quiet down after while.' It would have made any other man dizzy to look at 'em.

"Who finally won the game? The Roarers; but they had to employ the scurviest kind of underhand methods in order to do it. It was in the first of the ninth. They were one run to the good, two men were gone, Bull Thompson was jumping hopefully on third and Home Run Hankins was at the bat. Suddenly some one on the Roarers' bleachers sang out, 'Hey, Bull Thompson! You're stocking's coming down.' The Bull started to stoop, and then, suspecting treachery quickly straightened up and resumed his jumping. Priest shot the ball over and the third baseman clapped it on to the Bull.

"'You're out at third!' the umpire shouted. 'Gee, but you're jumping high.'

"The Bull's momentary hesitation had put him out of time with the umpire. They who hesitate are lost!"

Checks Bad Things to Meddle With.

"You can't monkey with a check," said a business man, "as a friend of mine has learned at the cost of $3 or $4 for protest fees. He lives in Springfield, Mass., and to that point the other day I sent him a check for rent. In a couple of days I received a blank check from him on my bank, with the request that I would do him a favor to fill out my checks before sending them to him in payment for any obligations. I was certain I had filled the check out that I had intended for him, but I thought possibly I had sent him a blank check and had lost the other or sent it off in some letter or other, so to prevent any future trouble I called at my bank and stopped payment on what I thought was a missing check. Two or three days later I got another letter in which he explained that he was having fun with me, because in sending him my check I had torn off two from the pad and they were stuck together, and he thought it would be a joke to send the blank one back to me before it filled. It had cost him the fees, and he was sorry that he had been so funny, and he wouldn't do so any more."

Second Crop Christmas Presents.

"You might think," said a Post Office clerk, "that all the Christmas presents that were going to be sent by mail wouldbe sent not later than Dec. 24, but there is quite a little sprinkling of presents mailed later. These make a sort of second crop that springs up, as you might say, out of the seed of unexpected presents.

"There are always a certain number of people who receive at Christmas time presents from people who had not been expected to send them anything and to whom they had sent nothing. But when the unexpected present comes straightway the recipient responds with one from himself, and such second crop presents make all together quite a little bunch, but not, of course, to be in any way compared with the ante-Christmas avalanche."

WITCH AND WIZARD STORIES.

Edgar Merritt, the Train Boy, and His Painful Experience With Black Magic.

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Edgar Merritt, the train boy, who sold books, papers and candies on the N., X, and Q. road, was ordinarily respectful, but he had had bad luck on the trip: had taken in a counterfeit dollar, and so, when the wizened-up man with the yellowish white beard and the rat-like and neighboring eyes, wanted to get a dollar-fifty book for a quarter he forgot and answered the old man rudely.

It never pays to be rude, and (even if it did rudeness would be a poor thing to cultivate, for it is like a wild cucumber vine for growth, and a single summer is sufficient to cover the whole of a boy's manner with incivility. But in this case it was exceedingly unfortunate that Edgar had spoken disrespectfully to the old man, for the latter was, in fact, the meanest wizard in all New England. He had escaped the wizard hunters of page 155 in your United States history, and although he was going on 300 years old he looked like an ill-preserved man of 65.

He was in an ugly mood that morning, for he had lost his chance of connecting with the train for Salem, and he vented his spleen on the train boy.

"Abracadabra!" said he under his breath, "may all the books you sell return to you until you are sorry that you were rude to so great a wizard as I."

Edgar, wholly unconscious that his books had been bewitched, walked on down the aisle. He had already forgotten his words to the old man, and soon he met a friend of his at the forward end of the car, a bank President who sometimes chatted with him and encouraged him with stories of his boyhood, for he had risen from the poorest beginnings. Edgar was always glad when he was a passenger on the train, and as he had now shown his books to every one in the car, he sat down beside the banker and said "Good morning, sir. I suppose you don't want to buy any books to-day."

"Well, no, my boy. I never read on trains, and when I get to the city I won't have much time for reading. The time to sell me books is when I'm headed the other way. I like to make up lost time when I sit down in my sitting room after dinner."

"What do you mean by making up lost time, sir?" asked Edgar.

"Why, I mean that if, when I was a boy, you had come along to the little shanty where I was born with your stock of books I would have looked upon it as the greatest day of the year. The only book I had to read was the last ten chapters of "Robinson Crusoe," but I learned to read out of that, and the first money I earned I spent in buying the complete book. You boys, nowadays, don't know what it is to struggle."

"It's a struggle sometimes to sell books, sir," said Edgar with a bit of a smile.

"Is it? How many have you sold this morning?"

"Only three, and one man gave me a counterfeit dollar, and a mean old man on this train had the cheek to offer me a quarter for a dollar and a half book. I have my own troubles."

Well," said the banker, "you have had bad luck. I'll buy a book, and put it in my coat pocket, as I never read on the train. Bad for the eyes."

The banker bought the book and put it into the pocket of his coat, which he laid over the back of the seat. Edgar thanked him, and in a few minutes he picked up his tray and went into the baggage car.

But, of course, the book that he had just sold was under the enchantment of the mean old wizard, and it immediately left the pocket of the banker and unseen by mortal eyes, it went back to Edgar's tray.

At the next station about a hundred people got on, so in a few minutes Edgar went through the train again, calling out: "All the latest books of the day. Buy the popular successes."

This time he had very remarkable luck. He sold eight books, more than he generally sold on an entire run. And, strange to say, one of his patrons was the old wizard, who actually bought and paid for one of the most expensive books, remarking:

"I'm tired of looking out of the window; guess I'll read. I hear every one talking about this book." As he took it, after paying for it, pulled out a pencil and wrote on the fly leaf: "Cotton Mather Hopkins." "There," said he, "now that's mine."

Edgar had sold his books as he was going down the train and when he had reached the end he turned to come back. Some of the purchasers had started to read their books, some, like the banker, had put them in their coat pockets, but those who were reading felt themselves irresistibly compelled to lay them down, and once out of their hands the books flew back to Edgar's tray.

The old man was the first to say anything. All the rest were so alarmed at missing their books so suddenly that they supposed that they were suffering from some hallucination (which word is still in the dictionary, youngster, I am glad to say, and they did not feel like speaking about the occurrence. But the old man who had caused all the mischief piped up in his squeaky voice:

"Here, you train boy! Bring back my book."

"I haven't got your book," said Edgar, indignantly.

He was just abreast of the old man on his return when he said this, and Mr. Hopkins, with wonderful agility for a three hundred-year-old, rose to his feet and snatched the book out of the tray.

"Isn't that my book that I paid for? What's this? 'Cotton Mather Hopkins, Salem, Mass.'"

Edgar colored, but he said bravely:

"You must have put the book there yourself, sir. That's certainly your book, but the last time I saw it you were reading it."

The old man was so exceedingly unpleasant looking, while Edgar had such a frank, rosy face that the passengers who heard the conversation sided with the boy, and one of them said: "I've been watching that boy and 'm sure he didn't take a book from you."

But just then a very wrathy looking man who sat in front of Edgar, and who had been listening to the conversation, rose and said: "Well, my name is Simon Swan, and I bought 'All in a Day' and wrote my name in it. I laid it down for a minute and looked out of the window and it was gone in a moment. If I am not mistaken, this is the copy."

And he picked up a book which bore on the inside cover a scrawly signature that looked like "Lemon Snow," but which was undoubtedly "Simon Swan."

At this Edgar burst into tears. "It's a game some one has put up on me," said he. "I never took the books. I can support myself without being dishonest. What would I steal for?"

The banker here spoke up. He was sitting three seats in front, but the old man's squeaky tones had roused him from a nap.

"I'm something of a reader of character," said he, "and I am sure that this boy would not knowingly take books that did not belong to him. He expects to stay on this road and sell books every day. How long would he keep his place if the superintendent of the news company found out that he was stealing the books? I admit there's something queer about it, but I'd as soon think he'd take the book I bought as suppose he'd take any other man's. Now, I bought 'The Prince's Daughter' from him, and here it is in my pocket."

As the banker spoke he took his coat from the seat and put his hand into the pocket. There was no book in it.

The banker looked grave and surprised, and put his hand into the other pocket, just as an officious person took a copy of "The Prince's Daughter" from Edgar's tray.

"I didn't write my name in the book, so you can't prove that that one is mine," said the banker testily to the man.

But Edgar, of all persons, said sturdily: "That is your book all right, for I had only one copy of the 'Prince's Daughter.' I don't know what is the matter, but I know I never took the books."

"Well, I will say one thing for this young man," said old Cotton Mather Hopkins, in his squeaky voice. "He is the most skillful thief I ever saw."

This was Edgar's salvation, for a young lawyer who sat in the front seat on the right, spoke up as quick as a flash: "You are right. Now, I've missed my book. The boy has not been within ten feet of me since I bought it. Mine was 'An Italian Summer,' and I pasted my book plate in it as soon as I bought it. Mine's missing. If the boy has it there's a wizard on this car!"

Every one looked eagerly at Edgar, who drew from his tray of books the lawyer's copy, with a quaint book plate freshly gummed in and bearing his name in old English characters.

Just then the conductor came through the car. The lawyer appealed to him. "Have you ever had any trouble from sorcerers or witches, or wizards on this train? Here's your train boy been accused of taking books that were out of his reach, and he has 'em, too."

The conductor, Harry Beecham, was a fine black-mustached fellow, with a soft, kindly eye and a hearty laugh.

"I guess old Cotton Mather Hopkins has een up to his tricks again. Edgar is as honest as any boy I ever saw. Here, Hopkins, you make those books return to their owners or I'll throw you out of the window."

He made a move toward the old man, and jovial though he was, he looked capable at that moment of doing as he said, and as the train was going at the rate of sixty miles an hour through a rocky country, the fall would have been disastrous to the old wizard, for wizards cannot always save themselves from personal injury.

"The boy was impudent to me," began Mr. Hopkins.

"I'm sorry. He's right. I was," said Edgar, penitently.

"Always respect gray hairs, my boy," said the banker.

"But that doesn't alter the fact that you served the boy a mean trick," said the conductor. "Now, reverse your charm, or out you go. One—two——"

"Abracadabra!" said the wizard as the conductor reached over and opened the window. "May the books all visibly return to their owners."

In a second eight books whisked up and down the aisle and the passengers were all glad to see that Edgar was honest.

But the banker now had something to say. He rose in the aisle.

"I think it is outrageous that a wizard as old as this man should play mean tricks on an honest boy who is trying to support himself and his mother, and I move that Mr. Hopkins buys out Edgar's stock, particularly as Edgar has apologized for his impert