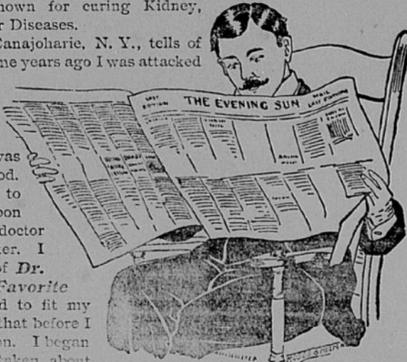


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# A TROOPER GALAHAD.

BY CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

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[CONTINUED.]

The infantry were sounding first call for retreat parade and the womenfolk were beginning to muster on the porches and the warriors of the foot along the opposite side at the barracks and as Captain Barclay, a light rattan stick in his hand, came strolling back from stables, Lieutenant Brayton at his side, little Jim Lawrence made a dash from a group of children, and in the full hearing of several officers and half a dozen women, a shrill, eager, childish voice piped out the fatal words:

"Uncle Gal—Uncle Gal—what did Mr. Bralligan mean by telling Mr. Winn to send his wife to you for money?"

Laura Winn herself was on the nearest piazza at the moment, stunningly handsome, and posing, evidently for a bow from the next door neighbors as they came by. She and every other woman there distinctly heard the words and marked the effect.

Sir Galahad's face flushed crimson. He caught his little friend up in his arms and held him close to his burning cheek. "Hush, Jimmy boy. He meant nothing, and soldiers never repeat such nonsense. Run to Sister Ada and help her get everything ready for papa's coming. Think, Jimmy, he'll be here by tattoo." And with a parting hug he set the youngster down at his doorstep and started him on his way. Then, courteously raising his cap to the gathering on the nearest porch, and noting, as did they, that Mrs. Winn had disappeared within her hall, Barclay quickly entered his own portal, and nabbed Brayton as he was making a palpable "sneak" for the rear door. The youngster found escape impossible. Willy nilly, the boy told the story as it had been told to him, Barclay standing looking straight into his eyes, as though reading his very soul, yet never saying a word beyond the original, "You heard what Jimmy said. It is another instance of 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' Brayton. Now, tell me exactly what you know."

It was a warm May evening. A hot southwest wind had been blowing from the broad valley of the Rio Bravo, and the



Sir Galahad felled him like an ox. few men in the clubroom at 9 o'clock were demanding cooling drinks. Bralligan was there, looking somewhat solemn and sheepish. He knew that nothing but the presence of senior officers had prevented a serious fracas as the result of his asinine bray that morning, but now that Winn was out of the way and the matter in the hands of his captain he had no dread of the thrashing he deserved and was disposed to an exhibition of bravado. A drink or two added to his truculence as well as to his desire to resume the game interrupted that morning. There were always in those days a few reliable gamblers at the big frontier posts, and presently Bralligan, in his shirt sleeves, was contemplating a sizable pile of chips and bantering a burly captain to "see his raise," when suddenly he became aware of a distracted look in the eyes of the group about the tables, and, glancing toward the door, his own bloodshot orbs lighted upon the trim figure of Captain Barclay, standing calmly surveying the party—Barclay, who never smoked, drank or played cards and who was reported to have started a movement for prayer meetings among the enlisted men. His very presence in that atmosphere was ominous, especially as the gaze of his usually soft brown eyes was fixed on Bralligan. One or two men said, "Good evening, captain," in an embarrassed way, but the Irish subaltern only stared, the half grin on his freckled face giving place to an uneasy leer. On a bench to the left of the entrance stood a huge water cooler, with gourds and glasses by its side. Underneath the spout was a big wooden pail two-thirds full of drippings and rinsings. Without a word the newcomer stepped quietly within the room, picked up the bucket, and, striding straight to the table before Bralligan could spring to his feet, deftly inverted the vessel over the Irishman's astonished head, deluging him with discarded water and smashing the rim well down on his unprotected shoulders. An instant more, and Bralligan sent the bucket whirling at his assailant's head, which it missed by a yard—then, all dripping as he was, followed it in a furious charge. Sir Galahad "side clipped" with the ease and nonchalance of long but unsuspected practice and let fly a white fist which found lodgment with stunning crash straight upon the Irishman's ear, felling him like an ox.

### CHAPTER VIII.

And so Ned Lawrence got back to Worth to find it far livelier than when he left it. The stage with its joyous escort had come trundling in just before tattoo, and first and foremost the returning wanderer was driven to his own doorway and left for half an hour with Ada and Jimmy—the one sobbing with joy, the other laughing with delight—on the father's knees. Then Mrs. Blythe stole in to bid them to the waiting supper, and, pending Lawrence's reappearance somewhere along the line, the officers gathered in low voiced groups discussing the startling event of the evening. Bralligan, raging for the blood of the double dashed, triple adjected bound who had assaulted him, had been lugged home by two or three of his kind, consoled by Captain Mullane with the assurance that he'd see that the preacher gave him full satisfaction in the morning, for, with native love of a ruction, Mullane stood ready to bear the subaltern's challenge, even though his better nature told him the ducking was richly deserved; with Irish honor in question, Mullane was for fight. Frazier and Brooks, of course, said the seniors present, must not be allowed official knowledge of what had taken place, though in those heightened days of magnificent distances from the center of civilization and the exploring grounds of reporters of the press, many a stirring row was settled without its ever being heard of beyond the limits of the garrison in which it occurred. Captain Barclay, contenting himself with the one blow, despite an un-Christian impulse to follow it up with a kick at the sprawling figure, had stood calmly by when Bralligan's associates lifted him, half stunned, to his feet, then, addressing himself to Mullane, with just the least tremor in his voice and twitching to his muscles, remarked: "Of course you know what led to this, sir. If your lieutenant desires to follow it up, you can find me at my quarters." Then, looking very deliberately around upon the little circle of flushed or pallid faces—there were only five officers present—he slowly turned, walked away and shut himself in his room.

A light was still burning there when Brayton tiptoed in at half past 10. He, with several other cavalrymen, had been sitting in the major's parlor, listening to Lawrence's tale of his experiences in Washington. Winn had rejoined the party late, and one glance at his face was enough to tell Brayton that somewhere he had heard of the fracas at the clubroom. Brayton's boyish heart was bubbling over with pride and delight in this new and unlooked for side to his captain. Every day of his service with that officer only served to strengthen the regard and admiration Brayton felt for him. Barclay had made no pretense of being a cavalryman on the strength of his assignment to that arm. He started with the assertion that he had everything to learn, and then surprised his subaltern by an extensive knowledge of what we then called "the tactics." He was certainly not as much at home in saddle as on foot and did not pretend to be, but he was by no means a poor or ungraceful rider. He had a light, gentle hand, at least—a thing much harder for most men to acquire than a good seat. He was very cool, just and level headed with the members of the troop, not a few of whom thought to "run it" on the "doughboy" captain, but all such projects had flattened out within the fortnight after his coming. Barclay might not know horses, but he did know men, and the first sergeant was the first to find it out—the new captain calmly and almost confidentially pointing out to him, after ten days of apparently casual glances over the messroom and kitchen, that the men were not getting their proper allowance of coffee, and that the savings made on the rations did not all go where they belonged.

"Boy an man, sorr," began Sergeant Sullivan oratorically and with true indignation, "I've served in the dragoons or cavalry the best 15 years of me life, an this is the furst time me honor's been called into account. I shall tender me resignation at wast."

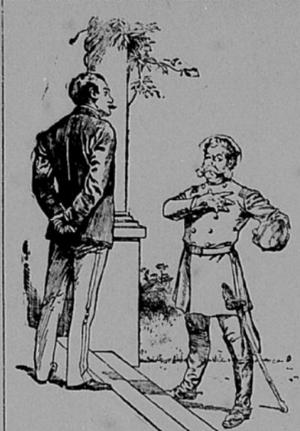
"I have had its acceptance in contemplation for some days, sergeant," was the calm response. "But first we'll overhaul the accounts."

"Carnel Larns, sorr, would niver have treated an ould soldier in this way."

"That, I fear, is true," was the imperturbable response, "and as a consequence the colonel appears to have been robbed right and left, your own name being brought into question. That will answer for the present, sergeant."

And when the troop heard that Denny Sullivan had been "broke" and was to be tried by court martial for thieving great was the comment excited, and the men began to wonder what manner of doughboy was this, after all, that had come to them—the doughboy that ould Denny had so confidently counted on running to suit himself. But this didn't begin to be all. A very acute trailer was Galahad. Those were days in which only a subaltern, and not always even a subaltern, was expected to appear at morning stables, but the new captain liked to rise early, he said. He was up with the sun or earlier, and hoofs or wheel tracks about the stables before the herd was led forth to water never escaped his attention, yet ap-

parently never called on the



"Sorr," he said, "I am the bearer of a verbal missige!"

commissioned officer was suddenly nabbed, and so was a wagon load of forage, going off to a neighboring ranch at 4 o'clock in the morning. Meantime the men noted that their coffee and rations were better and more bountiful, and soldiers are quick to receive impressions that come by way of the stomach. "The new captain is knocking out the old abuses," said they, and it was wonderful how soon the ex-doughboy made his way into their good graces. There had been some disposition on the part of the wits in other companies to refer to Barclay's men as the "Parson's Own" when it was announced that the captain had attended the chaplain's evening service, but even that was beginning to die out, when all of a sudden it was noised abroad this evening that the redoubtable Bralligan had been felled by a single blow of that Quaker fist.

Brayton was fairly quivering with excitement this night of nights and could not sleep. He longed to see his captain and hear his version of the affair, but the door was tightly closed instead of being invitingly open, and he dared not intrude. Not one word had been said about the matter at the major's, but Brayton knew it would soon be known even to the officer in command. So long, however, as it was not reported to him officially Frazier would probably let the affair take its course. Bralligan deserved the knockdown, and doubtless would be glad enough to let the matter end there. But, thought Brayton, if he should demand satisfaction and Barclay's religious or conscientious scruples were to prevent his acceptance, "then comes my chance," for the youngster himself proposed to take it up. He had no scruples. He had been longing for a chance to kick that cad Bralligan for over a year, and after all it was Barclay that got it.

Eleven o'clock, and Barclay's light still burned. Eleven-thirty, and still reading or writing, the captain seemed occupied in the old poker room, and the door remained closed. Once or twice Brayton heard him moving about, and in his own excitement and interest the boy found it impossible to think of anything else. Twelve o'clock came. He was beginning to undress and prepare for bed, still uneasily watching the light shining through the crack of the door, when his straining ears caught the sound of a footfall underneath his window. It opened on the yard, and the sill was only five feet or so above the ground. A hand was uplifted without and tapped gently on the sash, and as Brayton drew aside the curtain Harry Winn's face was revealed in the moonlight.

"Come to the porch in front," he uttered low. "I must speak with you."

Brayton was out on the dark piazza in half a minute. He found Winn nervously pacing the boards.

"I told my wife I had to come out and think quietly awhile," he said as he extended a hand to his silent classmate. "She heard of this—this damnable business almost as quick as it happened. That girl of ours hears everything and tells anything. There's no doubt about it, I suppose. You were there? You heard it at once, didn't you?"

"What does—he say?" And Winn's nod indicated that he meant Barclay.

"Nothing," said Brayton briefly. "I haven't seen him."

"But he's up. The light's in his window. He's writing—or something. Look here, Brayton, you know what's got to come of this. That d— Irishman must challenge him or be cut and kicked about by all his kind in the cavalry. It isn't Barclay's fight; it's mine. The more I think of it the more I know that, contemptible a blackguard as Bralligan is, he is still an officer of the regiment. He has been knocked down, and has the right to demand the only satisfaction there is for a blow. You know it as well as I do. What I've got to do right here and now is to take that fight off Barclay's hands, and you've got to help me."

"S'pose he don't want it taken off his hands," said Brayton sturdily. "He told him plain enough he was ready to meet any demand."

Winn reddened even in the pallid moonlight. "I say no man in this garrison fights on my wife's account except me—or with me. They're up with Bralligan now, two or three of them, and I want you to go there with me at once as my witness. I mean to cowhide him tonight. Then if he wants a meeting in the morning I'm his man." And as he spoke Winn thrashed nervously at the rilling with the stout whip he carried in his hand.

"That won't fix it," answered Brayton, "and you ought to have sense enough to know it. Barclay has the precedence. The Mick couldn't challenge you until he'd fought him—or been refused a fight. You go to bed, Winn," and Brayton spoke even lower.

"Your wife must have heard you just now, and first thing you know Barclay will hear you, and"—with almost comical irrelevance—"you don't want to meet him this way, when you haven't even called on him."

Winn reddened again. There was a tinge of bitterness in his tone as he answered:

"Don't trouble yourself about Mrs. Winn's hearing. She's placidly asleep—long ago. As for my not calling, you know I've only been out of my bed three days or so, and Captain Barclay must understand that a man burdened as I have been is in no mood for social observances. This is all begging the question. You're the only man I can ask to be my second. Finish your dressing now and come."

"Winn, I won't do it," said Brayton, with flat footed decision. "This is my captain's affair, and from what I've seen of him since he joined I'm bound to say what's his is mine. Besides, you've got no business mixing up in the matter. You've got your wife to think of, and you've got that commissary business to straighten out. Barclay and I have no incumbrances of either kind." At the moment, I fear me, the young gentleman could have added, "Thank God," for with all his appreciation of the physical perfections of his classmate's wife Mr. Brayton was keenly aware of her many extravagances.

"Of course I've a wife," answered Winn hotly. "It's because of her I feel bound to take this up. As for that commissary money, every cent will be here to square the shortage, whether I am or not. I'll tell you what others—No, I can't even tell you, Brayton. But an old friend of my father's has offered his help. Now, once more, will you come or not?"

"No, Winn. You know well enough I'd see you through if—Hush! There's Mullane and some one else coming out of his quarters now."

"Then, by God, I'll go alone," exclaimed Winn, "and it's got to be done before they get away." And he would have gone springing down the steps, but Brayton seized and held him.

"For God's sake, Harry, be quiet tonight. Don't go near him. Quiet, man. Can't you see? Those fellows are coming this way now."

True enough, Mullane and his companion, who had issued from the fourth set of quarters down to the left, turned northward the moment they reached the walk, the moonlight gleaming on the buttons of their uniform frock coats, but the sight and faint sound of scuffling on Winn's porch seemed to attract their attention. They stopped as though to reconnoiter, and just then the front door of Brayton's hall opened wide, and, with the broad light at his back, Captain Barclay stepped quietly forth.

"Brayton," he said, "you left the door ajar, and it was impossible not to hear the latter part of this conference. Mr. Winn, I presume," he continued, with calm, courteous bow, as the two young men, unclasping, turned and faced him. "I infer that you purpose going to Mr. Bralligan's quarters—now. Let me urge that you do nothing of the kind. Brayton is right. I see that, late as it is, some of their party are moving this way. Pray remember that as yet this is entirely my affair."

There was no time for other answer than a bow, a mumbled word or two, an embarrassed acceptance of the hand extended by the captain. Just as he said, Mullane and his friend were coming rapidly up the walk. They passed the Winn's gate, entered that of Brayton, and then it appeared that Mullane's friend was the ubiquitous Hodge, that Mullane was manifestly in his glory and that both were perceptibly in liquor.

"Gentlemen," said the doughty captain, halting at the foot of the steps and raising his forage cap with magnificent sweep, "gentlemen, I am the bearer of a missive from me friend Mr. Bralligan. Have I the honor of addressing Captain Barclay?" Fondly did Mullane imagine that he impressed his hearers as did Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and much did he remind one of them, at least, of Captain Costigan of blessed memory.

"This is Captain Barclay," that gentleman answered in low tones, with a smile of amusement at Mullane's grandiloquent prelude, yet stepping quickly forward to meet the envoys. Winn could not but note that the captain's movement accomplished at once two objects—it left him and Brayton in the shade and it kept Mullane and Hodge in the moonlight and off the steps. "Pardon my suggesting that a lady sleeps in the front room aloft there and that you speak low, so as not to disturb her. Where is your message?"

This was trying. Mullane loved his chest tones as he did his whisky. His low voice was apt to be thick and husky and unimpressive, and tonight he was overweighted with the sense of the gravity and importance of his mission if with nothing else.

"Sorr," he said, with another flourish of the cap, "in accordance with the practice of gentlemen in the old army, I am the bearer of a verbal missige!"

The Quaker captain had already amazed the old dragoon sergeants by the intricacy and extent of his knowledge of their manners and customs. Now came a surprise for the officers.

"Pardon my interrupting," he said. "I do not assume to instruct in such matters, but there is manifestly only one kind of message 'according to the customs of the old army'—and here he smiled quietly—"that should come from Mr. Bralligan now, and it must come in writing. I decline to recognize any other." Here Brayton nudged Winn approvingly, but the subalterns maintained a decorous silence.

"I've niver hurrd of a challenge before refused on that account," said Mullane majestically, "an if me wuredds are not sufficient here's me friend Mr. Hodge!"

"Your words are not brought into question, Captain Mullane, but the manner of your message is. Let your friend put it in writing, and it will be