

AN HUMBLE HERO

BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT

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CHAPTER IX.

A DANGEROUS MEETING.

Although a couple of weeks had passed since James Melvin arrived on Possum Ridge, the public had by no means lost interest in him, and neither had his closest friends. In fact, in any degree of safety, it was almost a matter of wonder, and speculation concerning him—his past life and character and his purpose in coming to the Ridge—was as rife as it had ever been.

Of course his statement to old man Turner that he had come there to prospect for mineral had spread abroad among the public, but there were a few who who looked for a moment that there was a word of truth in it. There were no mineral developments in that section and, so far as any one knew, no indications of mineral deposits. In view of these things, what likelihood was there of a company of capitalists sending a man there on any such mission?

Pap Sampson, so boastful of his ability to judge people at first sight, had been compelled to admit, though he did it reluctantly enough, that for once he had made a mistake when he so confidently asserted that Melvin was a preacher and that his object in coming to Possum Ridge was to hold some "meetings" at the Crown Inn "meeting house." Jason Roberts, still having an excuse for holding to his first formed opinion, continued to argue that the way away from him. When she spoke, there was resentment in her voice.

"I don't think I have given you any excuse for saying that," she said. "If I have, I didn't mean it. You must let me have you nothing more to say to me after all our long separation?" he asked in hurt tones.

"I have said too much already," she replied.

"I did not mean to say anything to hurt you, and I humbly and sincerely beg your forgiveness. Loving you as I do, I would not hurt a hair of your head. Won't you believe me, Louisa?"

"Yes, I believe you. Now let me go."

"No, no, not yet! Think how long it has been since I saw you! Don't go just yet."

"I must."

"It is so cruel, Louisa!"

"It is who is so cruel?"

"I? How?"

"Can't you understand what your keeping me here means?"

"I can understand that it means a taste of heaven to me."

"And more pain and suffering for me?"

"Why should it do that?"

"Do you think I have no conscience?"

"No, but I think it costs an honest woman nothing to keep a thing like this a secret from her husband?"

"I don't know. But, there, I will not keep you, though it is hard to let you go. When shall I see you again?"

"Never."

"No; don't say that! I must see you!"

"That I loved you?"

"Didn't you know it then?"

"No. I knew I liked you, and I thought of you sometimes in a different way from what I ever thought of you one else, but I was young, and I didn't know what love was."

"Why did you marry—that other?"

"My parents urged me, and I liked him. I even thought I loved him. Afterward there was an awakening, and then I knew the truth. That awakening was bitter and cruel."

"And you suffered?" he said softly, placing his hand on her head.

"Yes, I suffered," she replied wearily, "and God alone knows how much I suffered for it."

"I know," he said, again taking her hands in his. "But there is the future."

"She shook her head slowly."

"It will be the same as the past and the present. I shall go on suffering to the end."

"But you need not."

"I must."

He was thoughtfully silent for a little while. Then he said:

"Louisa, you have no right to sacrifice your life and happiness, and not only your life and happiness, but mine. It would be a sin, a happy sin, but it is—the other."

She knew his meaning, and she drew away from him. When she spoke, there was resentment in her voice.

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once, but she would not accuse him even to himself. She drew a little nearer to him and spoke in low tones.

"Frank," she said, "tell me the truth. What have you done?"

"Yes, you can't," he asked, "that I had better tell you?"

"Yes; I must know."

"But it is dreadful, Louisa."

"Yes; I expect the worst."

"The very worst?"

"The very worst."

"And you do not shrink from me?"

"Yes, because you say you were not to blame and that you couldn't help it."

"But I tremble to tell you."

"Have no fear for me. I believe what you have said. You have—"

"Taken the life of a fellow man!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You just go ahead, Pap Sampson, an ask all the questions you please. I'll answer all I kin of 'em, an when you ask one I can't scrape up an answer for I'll holler."

"Very well. Now, then, Jason Roberts, can you tell me why a fellow flixin to have a spell of fever would go mope in round for two long weeks, not a feelin sick nor nothin, but just actin for all the world like he'd lost ever' cent he owned an eye? friend he had to his back? Can you jest tell me that?"

"'Coudn't a feller flixin to have the fever act that a-way?"

"Mebby he could, Jason, but he don't. You hain't answered my question, though."

"My notion is, Pap, that that ain't no need of him an' ever' cent he owned an eye. You an' Jason's both got the wrong pig by the tail."

"If you're so smart, Jim Thorn, why don't you retrace into the pen an git a hold of the tail of the right pig?"

"I have."

"Then you jest show that pig to us an let us see its color, will you?"

"I'll show 'em all the questions you please, I'll answer all I kin of 'em, an when you ask one I can't scrape up an answer for I'll holler."

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hole in it."

The men exchanged a surprised glance, but for a little while no one spoke. Finally, however, Hicks broke the pause.

"Yes," he said, "have you been seeing that Melvin an some woman doin like you said?"

"'Thout mentionin no names, Jake, I'm bound to say I have."

"When was it, an whar?"

"'Xtiddy evenin, right down here in Jim Banks' own piece of timber land."

"Tell us all 'bout it, 'coud you?"

"Yes, 'coud I. I was standin watchin of chairs up 'boser around Sam, and a hush almost as still as death fell over the little group. There was little, very little, of excitement or interest in the lives of the citizens of Possum Ridge, and when anything strange or out of the common did happen they liked to make the most of it and enjoy it to the fullest possible extent."

"Then, too, in this instance, they seemed do something in the way of scandal, and that made them all the more eager listeners. Unsupervised and simple as they were, they possessed that insatiable curiosity and that morbid love of the unsavory which are not altogether things apart from the lives of many of the more cultured."

Sam Morgan, finding himself the center of an eager group who waited with open mouths for him to speak, felt his impotence, and it was excusable in him that he remained silent for a little while to enjoy the situation. It was not every day he could occupy a position like that, and it was very natural that he should desire to make the most of it.

But glorying in a triumph, even such a triumph as that, cannot last forever. So finally Sam condescended to speak.

"I'd been out a huntuin," he began "an, comin 'long up across Sim Banks' timber land, I felt sorter tired an 'lowed I might'st, well set down an rest a bit. So I turned out of the path an went a few steps out to that big tree that Pap Sampson told us he shot six squirrels out of at one time when he was a young feller. You all mind 'bout that tree, I reckon."

"They all nodded assent. Then Pap Sampson spoke.

"It was seven squarrels, Sam, 'stid of six."

"You said six last time you told 'bout it," Sam replied. "I mind that most distinctly."

"An five time before that," Jason Roberts added. "Lord, I reckon it'll be eight next time Pap tells that story."

"Waal, don't squarrels nat'rally multiply an increase?" Pap asked.

"Not dead uns don't," Jason replied.

"That was seven squarrels if that was all I mind I counted 'em both before I killed 'em an' afterward—seven squarrels setin 'long on a limb all in a row, with all their heads turned the same way. I drewed up my old rifle an took aim at the head of the highest to me an' bagged away. Imagine my surprise when all seven of them sprang come a tumble out of that tree an fell in a pile on the ground, that bullet havin gone clean through ever' one of their heads."

"An then gone on an killed a wild turkey over in another tree," Jason added.

"Waal, yes, that's allus been my opinion," Pap admitted, "but that was another feller shot his gun off at the same time an he would've killed the turkey. But, as you was sayin, Sam, you tuck a few steps out to that tree?"

"An set down behind it in the shade," Sam resumed. "I'd been a settin that 'bout ten minutes, I guess—don't 'low it could 'a' been more'n 10 minutes an I'd been a-dozin 'em like when all to once I heard voices a-talkin. I peeped round the tree kinder cautious, an then I see that Mr. Melvin an a woman—I ain't mentionin no names, a standin in that talkin, pow'd interested, him a-holdin both of her han's in his'n."

"What was they sayin?" Hicks asked eagerly.

"Waal, they talked kinder low most of the time," Sam replied, "so I couldn't hear much of it, but what I did hear was mighty int'restin, I can tell you."

"What was it?" Hicks asked, and the others all leaned forward in breathless eagerness to listen for the reply.

"Waal, in the first place," Sam said, "I heard Melvin say, 'It may be wrong, but I don't believe it is; but, right or wrong, I love you.'"

"'Lord!' Jason exclaimed. 'He was gittin sweet, wa'n't he? But what did she say then?'"

"She said, 'Don't say that! You ain't no right,' then he says, 'I have more right than anybody else, 'cause I love you more an 'cause you love me, an he says, 'Don't you love me?'"

"She didn't say nothin."

"It ain't nothin to me," Thorn replied, "an I guess I ain't got no call to tuck up in no such matters."

"That's sensible, Jim, an I feel 'bout it just like the rest of you," Hicks said. "We ain't none of us got no call to tell Sim Banks nothin, an the best thing we can do is to keep our mouths shut."

To tell you now, an use a gospel truth, as shure as Sim Banks ever finds out what Sam Morgan has told us he'll shoot that Melvin down jest like he would a sheep killin dog. You mark my word for that."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SERGEANT JASPER'S FLAG.

The Historic Colors Under Which He Fell Are in the Tower of London

The following communication to the Union Progress calls attention to a matter that ought to be of no little interest:

Under the heading "Sergt. Jasper's company," The State of March 27th, says: "In the valuable rubbish" at the State house there has recently been found the original company roll of which Sergt. Jasper, of Fort Moultrie fame was a member."

So there is within possible reach material for something more than an interesting exhibit at the coming Interstate and West Indian exposition in Charleston, and an opportunity for South Carolina to prove her appreciation of her glorious dead.

In Ramsey's "History of the Revolution," page 156, is found this footnote:

"On the third day after the action, the lady of Col. Bernard Elliott presented an elegant pair of colors to the second regiment which had so bravely defended Fort Moultrie. Her address on the occasion concluded thus: 'I may not be the least doubt, under heaven's protection, you will stand by these colors as long as they wave in the air of liberty. In reply a promise was made, that they should be honorably supported, and should never be tarnished by the second regiment.' This engagement was literally fulfilled. Three years after they were planted on the British lands at Savannah. One by Lieut. Bush, who was immediately shot down. Lieut. Hume in the act of planting his flag, was also shot down; and Lieut. Gray, in supporting them received a mortal wound. The brave Sergt. Jasper on seeing Lieut. Hume fall, took up the colors and planted them. In doing so he received a wound which terminated in death; but on the retreat being ordered he brought off the colors with him. These were taken at the fall of Charleston, and are said to be now in the tower of London."

From the above it is very evident that this flag is still in existence, and there is no doubt that, by proper effort, it can be obtained. Our State officers, members of Congress and Exposition authorities can unite their efforts and, with the support and influence of the President of the United States, can undoubtedly obtain it.

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Modern science throws light on many a dark problem of old times. It is on record that a Flemish scientist, three centuries ago, made an experiment to determine, if possible how and why a plant gains weight in growing. In a pot of earth weighing 200 pounds he planted a willow branch weighing five pounds. He kept the plant well watered, and at the end of five years found that the plant had gained 164 pounds in weight, while the earth in the pot had lost only two ounces. His conclusion was that the gain in weight was due solely to the water that he had supplied it with. But modern botanical science throws an entirely different light on the matter by providing that the gain was due principally to the carbon that the plant absorbed from the air.

Dr. H. F. Gray of Los Angeles, Cal., is said to have purchased 5,000,000 acres of agricultural lands in Mexico, and to have obtained a concession from the Mexican government for the establishment of a number of Mormon colonies thereon. These lands are divided into several large tracts, which are situated in the States of Durango, Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Vera Cruz. He says that he will bring 6,000 Mormons from Utah and other parts of the United States to settle upon the next few months and locate them upon the lands which he has purchased. The Mormon colonies in the State of Chihuahua have had their population increased by the arrival of over 2,000 Mormons from Utah during the last few months.

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