

THE STORY OF A HERO.

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

ONE day Grandmamma read us a story out of an old Day-Book, which was among the things which she greatly prized. This was what it said:

"It was a very cold evening, and my mother and I were sorely cast down, for that we had heard that my uncle Penfield, whilst carrying a dispatch from the American Headquarters, was taken prisoner by the British. Uncle Penfield being, as is well known, an exceedingly fearless man, mayhap took less precaution than is well in these times, when one may find a Redcoat at every fence-corner.

"Therefore, knowing that Uncle Penfield would likely be shot, my mother, albeit little given to repining, could not partake of the supper I had prepared, but sate by the fire looking sadly grieved. I, myself, could scarce forbear weeping; so merry-hearted and so dear hath Uncle Penfield ever been to us.

"It would seem that my uncle's brown sheep-dog, Hickory, could read the cause of our grief, or else he heard us speaking his master's name; for he would arise from the hearth and lay his head in my mother's lap, looking at her with eyes which held speech. Again, he would run to the door and whine and beg to be let out, as if to seek his master; for the two have been most close companions for many a year, and when Uncle Penfield entered the army, Hickory was as a child that is lost. Now it may seem like to a fairy-tale, somewhat; but whilst my mother sate stroking Hickory's coat, he threw his head upward, and of a sudden barked loud and sharply, springing to the door, scratching and whining like a thing distraught. And even as he did so, there came a tap at the window, and I threw open the door.

"My uncle Penfield himself sprang within and was clasped in our arms. Meanwhile Hickory rushed upon his master, barking, pawing and capering, as only a creature could do that was clean crazed with joy.

"But Uncle Penfield quickly closed the door, and I marked that he panted as from running, and was very pale.

"'I have escaped; but they are hard after me,' quoth he, leaning against the wall; 'hide

me somewhere, quickly. There was not time to make to the woods, nor dared I keep in open road. Lois, put up the dog!'

"It was well-nigh more than my strength could have done at ordinary times; but I seized Hickory's collar and dragged him outward to the kitchen shed, and tied him securely, despite his whines and barks, well knowing that did I not do so he would follow his master.

"Now I have oftentimes said that there seem to be some God-given quickness about a woman's mind in time of danger, and that her wit doth stand her in need, far better than would a coat of mail.

"When I tied Hickory and had returned, my mother stood in the sitting-room, with a hand resting on the table. Her fresh face showed pinker, methought, beneath her cap, and my uncle Penfield was not there.

"'Fetch thy wheel, Lois,' said she (for my mother spoke after the manner of Friends). And I obeyed, drawing the spinning-wheel to the hearth, whilst my mother sate to winding yarn and spake no word.

"'Mother,' said I, right curiously, 'whither is Uncle Penfield gone?'

"But she lay a finger on her lip, and stayed my wheel with her hand, saying: 'Hearken!'

"Upon the frozen road, afar off, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs.

"'Lois,' said my mother, 'draw the curtain from the window.'

"And straightway I drew the curtain away from the window, and the firelight danced outward merrily upon the darkness. Then did I resume my seat, and the sound of hoofs drew nearer and nearer.

"'Spin, Lois!' said my mother. And I plied the wheel busily. Of a sudden the horses' hoofs galloped nigh, then stopped, and there was silence without.

"'Turn not thy head,' said my mother, 'but sing aloud.'

"And straightway I sang the first thing that flew into my thought, which was 'Barbry Allan.' Nor did I turn my head; but for all that the brass and iron beneath my eyes had a shining ball on the top, and in it I did see figures

outside the black square of casement, faces peering in at us. My mother meanwhile sate serenely winding yarn, and I could hear Hickory crying and whining in the shed.

"Then there came a sharp rap at the door, and my mother turned her head.

"Unlatch the door, Lois," said she.

"I arose and unfastened the door. Six soldiers stood upon the threshold; two stood without, and I marked two went to the back of the house, and two did step within.

"Then did my heart sink like to a stone in the pond.

"My mother arose from the hearth and faced them; but before she could speak, the foremost said (and he had a voice that for gruffness could best be matched by an American cannon!) 'Mistress, we have warrant to search the house of John Bradley for the whereabouts of one Richard Penfield, a relative of John Bradley, who hath escaped from imprisonment.'

"My brother hath escaped, sir?" cried my mother, with show of surprise; 'now, thank Heaven for that!'

"And with that she seized a candle, and bidding me light another said:

"Seek at thy pleasure, gentlemen! The house is, indeed, John Bradley's, but Richard Penfield is not within; of that I can assure thee!

"So, with that, the soldiers began, and by candle-light they poked hither and thither, in and out, even to the settle cushions and the clock-case. With a man at the inner door, and another at the foot of the stairs, we lighted the two first here and there, whilst of a truth my heart thumped like an eight-day clock, and I was marvelling whither my mother could have spirited my uncle Penfield! Into the best parlor the soldiers went, peering under the furniture and even behind the asparagus boughs in the fireplace; up-stairs, throughout each room, and into every closet—even 'neath my mother's best taffeta gown and padded silk petticoat, until, had there been a rat in a hole, methinks they had found it!

"Then leaving one soldier to guard us—and I felt exceeding strange in being guarded on our own property—they took the light themselves and hunted through the attic. I marvelled much to hear my mother talking with some volubility to the soldier who stood guard over us, for she hath ever been a woman of few words. But it passed through my mind that

she dreaded lest he should ask her if she had seen my uncle Penfield, for then I knew that she would not say 'nay.' At last they descended the steps, and the first soldier said: 'Mistress Bradley, 'tis true that Richard Penfield is not in the house, but mayhap he is hidden in one of the outer buildings; therefore we will seek further.'

"Nay," said my mother, 'I shall light thee through the outer houses, gentlemen, that thy duty may be done; but I can tell thee that Richard Penfield is not hidden therein!'

"Then did I wonder the more as to where my uncle Penfield could lie hidden!

"So lighting lanterns we went outward with the soldiers, leaving two guarding the house, and being kept well guarded ourselves. And the two last sought through the barn and the smokehouse and dairy; but no sign of Richard Penfield was there to be found.

"When we passed the outer shed, Hickory well-nigh broke his chain striving to get free; for the sight of the strange men in company with Mother and me made him fearful lest we were being molested. One of the men went nigh him, but the dog growled and showed his teeth in a way not usual with him.

"When once more in the house, one of the soldiers asked for water; but my mother bade me fetch a pitcher of cider from the shed, saying:

"Mayhap thee'll have a long ride, gentlemen, and the cider will be more warming.'

"So when they had drank of the cider, they right surlily made off, one after the other, with much clanking and clanging of spur and saber. My mother and I stood in the door, and as the last one mounted his horse he spoke over his shoulder:

"You have done well, Mistress Bradley; but think not that we do not know Richard Penfield to be hereabouts! We shall yet run our game to earth!'

"And with that he cut his horse, and they galloped off.

"My mother lay her hand upon her heart, and her face showed quite white in the candle-light.

"He must go at once!" said she. 'They will return shortly, and no time must be lost. Listen well without, Lois!'

"Then did we listen until all sound of the horses' hoofs had passed from hearing.

‘Now hasten and fetch your water-pail to the well,’ said my mother, ‘lest some one overtake us.’

‘And in amazement I obeyed. Now our well has a mighty sized bucket, iron-bound and held by a great chain which wraps round and round the windlass.* At my mother’s bidding we each did seize the handle and strive to turn it. Surely, never did our well-bucket weigh so heavily! ‘Twere well-nigh more than our strength was equal to when we turned the handle twice around!

‘Then did my uncle Penfield’s head appear at the edge of the well. He stood in the bucket clinging to the chain, which he had shortened by tying a knot therein before climbing in the bucket. And then I knew why my mother was so ready to give the soldiers her cider rather than water from the well. My mother and I worked for a time heating drinks and preparing food for Uncle Penfield, who was well chilled through. And at two hours after midnight, he declared that he must hasten, fearing to wait till dawn.

‘Before starting, he went to the shed and bade farewell to Hickory, who did tear at his chain and collar, in frantic effort to follow his master. Then Uncle Penfield took the package of food, which Mother had prepared, and stole out in the darkness, we knew not whither.

‘For the rest of the night my mother and I lay abed wide awake listening to the dog whining and crying in the shed. But at dawn I fell into a heavy sleep, and when I awakened it was bright day and Mother stood beside me.

‘‘Lois’ said she, ‘the dog is gone. Methinks he hath followed his master.’

‘Now, it would seem that it was even so. For three days we waited for Hickory’s return; but he did not appear. The same British soldiers came again, and searched by daylight and kept watch about the place, until we scarce dared look out of the window for fear of seeing a redcoat!

‘But they did not discover Uncle Richard Penfield. We well knew that the search was kept up and that a death-sentence awaited his capture, and we marvelled much as to where he might be hidden. For ‘twere impossible to pass the British outposts on one hand, whilst sentries had been placed all along our river-bank on the other; and had he taken to the back

country and woods, even there hunger must drive a man forth from any place where he may be secreted.

‘Now ‘twas the fifth day at evening, and we were looking hourly for some tidings of Uncle Penfield’s capture, when of a sudden Hickory, the dog, dashed into the kitchen, fawning upon us, and barking with delight. He whined and begged, running from Mother to me as would a child.

‘‘The dog is well-nigh starved,’ said my mother. Then we hastened to give Hickory meat and bread, and to pet him whilst he snapped it down as if indeed famishing. But of a sudden he took a portion of the food in his mouth and dashed out of the door like the wind.

‘‘Lois,’ said my mother, ‘mayhap the dog will carry that to thy uncle Penfield!’

‘Now, the next evening the self-same thing occurred. At dusk did Hickory, the dog, dash in again, acting in the same manner and begging for food, and did snap at what we gave him; and my mother kept the largest piece till last, saying, ‘Go find Richard, Hickory—go find Richard!’

‘And once more did the dog run outward and disappear. Now we were convinced that the dog was indeed with his master, in hiding. But we were sorely perplexed as to what measures to take, lest Uncle Penfield should be suffering for food, and lest the dog should devour on the way that which was intrusted to him; for, after all, what doth a dumb beast know of self-denial?

‘On the third day, however, when Hickory had appeared and had been caressed and fed, and talked to about his master, he looked at us with dumb eyes that said, as plain as any speech, ‘I will take care of him.’

‘Now, we marked that the dog was without his collar; taken off, no doubt, by the hands that had sent him, that he might be less easily recognized; and we did not dare even to tie a package about his neck, or a note, for fear that he would be stopped on the way. To follow the dog, also, was an impossibility, for we would have been held by the sentry. Therefore, there was naught for us to do but to trust to the dog himself, that the food might be borne in safety to his master. But on this day, when we had given Hickory a large piece of meat to carry away, I marked a thread tied about his neck,

* In the part of the country described the same wells are used to-day. Some are over a century old.

and thereon, well hidden by his shaggy coat, was a brass button—one of our own officer's uniform buttons.

"Now, we knew that this must be a sign to us from Uncle Penfield; and my mother seized and untied it, and I did string thereon a tiny finger-ring, brought me by Uncle Penfield from the city of Philadelphia when I was a little maid.

"Then the dog made off again with the meat, and with the little ring hidden beneath his hair; but the next day and the next he did not appear, and we were sorely troubled lest he had been overtaken before reaching his master. Another day passed, and my mother had the food ready and we watched most anxiously; but Hickory did not come. Two more days went by and there was much bustle and stir. The American camp had been moved. There was talk of a surrender by Lord Cornwallis, and the British sentries had been advanced to the farther side of the river; and on the third day we were cheered by the arrival of a company of American soldiers.

"They were on their way from the village of Pluckamin, whence General Washington had spent the night. It was snowing hard, and knowing of the whereabouts of John Bradley's house, they halted for rest and refreshment.

"It doth indeed seem the special working of Providence, for whilst the soldiers sate around the fire, there came a scratching and whining at the door, and when I unlatched it Hickory again dashed in. I flew to fetch him food, which he fell upon as if starving—and, indeed, methinks he was, so wasted and thin had he grown. Whereupon my mother related to the soldiers the manner of Hickory's coming and going of late, and the finding of Uncle Penfield's army button about his neck, and how that for three days he had not appeared.

"Meanwhile no sooner had Hickory devoured the food than he ran unto my mother and seized her gown in his teeth and tried to drag her to the door.

"*'Mistress Bradley,'* spoke one of the soldiers, *'mayhap there is human meaning in the dog's action. We must go upon our way, but first methinks we should follow and see if in truth he has knowledge of the hiding-place of Richard Penfield, who, now that the sentry is removed from this side, would of himself venture thither, were he able.'*

"Whereupon they conferred together, and taking some cordial, proffered by Mother, in a vial, they did mount and when ready we opened the door, and straightway Hickory dashed out over the snow like a wild creature, with the soldiers galloping at his heels.

"And now, I can but set down that which was afterwards related to my mother and me by the American soldiers.

"They could at best but follow the dog's tracks through the snow, for he went like the wind and disappeared. The tracks led them straight to the river road. On the farther side they could see, here and there, the smoke curling from the British camp, or the gleam of a British musket where the sentries were placed. On our own side, the road wound around a cliff for a short distance. This cliff was hard for the foot of man to tread at best, and still harder in the snow. But they led their horses well out of sight, and, leaving two to guard them, they followed the dog's tracks up the side of the cliff. Midway the path was overgrown with brush and turned inward sharply to a cavern in the rock known to us as the Chief's Cave, because of an Indian skeleton once found therein.

"Within this cave, upon a pile of dead leaves, lay a man. It was, indeed, my uncle Penfield, and beside him crouched the dog, Hickory, who growled as the soldiers approached.

"Uncle Penfield was most shockingly emaciated, and too weak and ill with fever to partake of the meat which the dog had laid beside him. But they gave him of the cordial, and wrapped him in an army coat, and got him out of the cave and across the cliff, by the back way, unseen by the British on the opposite bank, whilst one of our soldiers retraced the path, and sent the horses to meet Uncle Penfield.

"At sunset they all returned, with my uncle held upon a horse, and Hickory trotting beside him. And when he was once wrapped up in Mother's bed, with the dog lying at the foot, Uncle Penfield opened his eyes, and said, quite clearly: *'The dog saved me!'*

"In time we were given an American guard, and a furlough was granted Uncle Penfield.

But he was so wasted and so ill from rheumatic fever that for a while we despaired of his life.

“ But when he was once able to lie propped on the settle before the fire, he told us over and again of Hickory’s faithfulness, from the day when he followed to the cave (which Uncle Penfield had reached by the back way, and which had enabled him to watch the British sentry from above); how that he found himself penned therein by the British sentry, and was fairly starving until he bethought him of sending Hickory home at dusk, and trusting to his return. The snow and rain did furnish water; but at length he was too ill to force the dog to go, and could but cling to him for warmth. But of a sudden Hickory started of his own accord. And well might

Uncle Penfield declare that had not the dog been so sagacious and faithful he himself would have died ere we found him. And of a truth so he would! Now surely there is no dog in Great Britain or America who has such lordly attention as Hickory! For all the soldiers have told of him at camp, and he now wears a collar fairly yellow with officers’ buttons, and by and by he will go to Philadelphia with his master.

“ Whereas Mother has enjoined upon me to chronicle that which I may learn of interest concerning our American heroes, I set this down about Hickory, Uncle Penfield’s dog; for I do believe that our own Commander-in-Chief, who most does honor loyalty and faithfulness, would be vastly proud of Hickory!”

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