

A RED COAT.

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD.

Among the discomforts endured by stay-at-home patriots during the American Revolution was that of having one's home swarming with British or Hessians, who were quartered in the houses conveniently situated for the purpose. In a well-worn Day Book, kept by one Mistress Lois Bradley, we find the following narrative, in the handwriting of a very young girl:

Dec., 1776.

My mother rebuked me yesterday, and rightly, 'tis certain. For if at first I differ from her I afterward discover the wise intent of her advice. 'Twas in this way:

"Mother," said I, "did I have my way I should burn my scarlet cloak straightway in the great fireplace."

"Burn thy cloak!" said she (for Mistress Lois's mother used the speech of Friends). Then I pointed outward, where two red-coated dragoons were entering the front of the house, and then toward the inner room, whence came the sounds of loud laughter, where ten more dragoons were seated around the table at supper; twelve in all having inhabited our house as an outpost for a week past.

"I would not wear a scrap of scarlet; no, nor see the sun rise again upon the color!" spake I.

"Daughter, I fear that thy spirit is hardening," said my mother, sighing. Then my throat did tighten, as when a child I would displease her, and I thought me of her heavy heart—and little wonder, for with father at the front in peril, and the British in the house, and the work early and late, 'twould seem that there is some hard fighting left to be done at home.

"Poor child! Thee is tired, daughter," said she. Then, ashamed of the tears which had arisen, I did force myself to laugh aloud, albeit not over merrily, saying:

"Nay, mother, thy daughter shall not forget that she is the only son of her father!" And scarcely had the false laughter passed my lips when a voice said:

"Faith, 'tis the first glad sound I have heard in many a day! Again, mistress, again!" And there in the door, with the sunset behind him, stood yet another scarlet coat, with his head back, smiling. Then something stirred within me, and turning, with the tears not dry upon my face, I spake out: "Sir, I own that the British army hath had power to make us weep, but our time for laughter is coming, when there shall be no British foot upon our soil!"

"Daughter!" spake my mother warningly.

The soldier, nowever, did but bow, with his hat on his heart, in a most elegant manner. He appeared to have come far and rapidly, and he bent his head listening to the sounds of laughter and rattling dishes from beyond.

"Your errand, sir?" said mother, with that gentle dignity which hath impressed more than one in these times.

"Mistress, will you be so good as to allow me a crust and a mug of coffee with those gentlemen in yonder?"

Mother gave assent, and then passed into the outer kitchen for the coffee, but it were so odd to hear one ask for what he would have rather than to take what he wished, that I looked more closely at him. He moved forward, and the light being no longer behind him, I could have declared to having

before his keen, gray eyes, which were glancing sharply around. A burst of laughter sounded from the other room, while a dragoon sang a song. To my astonishment the young red coat strode past me into the buttery, the door of which stood open. Displeased with this liberty, I sprang after to bid him come out, but he quickly caught my arm, exclaiming in a whisper:

"Hush, Mistress Bradley, not a sound, I beg!"

I gazed at him dumbly, and my heart beat hard. The table in the room beyond shook with the pounding of fists as the song ceased, and this soldier looked rapidly about the buttery, and spied the sliding panel, which, like a small window, opens into the larger room.

"Who are you?" I whispered, trembling.

"Trust me, Mistress Lois, and make no sign," he whispered back.

I listened amazed, for how might a British soldier know my name?

"There are friends near, and I rely on you to help us."

"Us?" spake I; "I'll do nothing blindly, sir, for you do not wear the American uniform."

"I'm but a sheep in wolf's clothing, then," he made answer with a twinkle of his eyes, "and you are indeed your father's daughter, and of his spirit. I am your mother's cousin, Geoffrey Herbert, at your service, Mistress Lois, who did as a lad carry you pick-a-back across a brook at one time whether you would or not. Cadwallader is at Crosswicks, and I was sent by him to reconnoiter, and was captured. But yesterday I did seize and blind my sentry, and managed to escape by effecting a change of clothing with him." He looked ruefully down at his red coat. "There were no other way, else had I been shot ere now, were it not for the displeased color. I met friends on my way hither, five brave young Philadelphians under Colonel Reed, and in there," he made a gesture toward the other room, "we find a pretty dish belonging to the king. Faith, with your help, we'll have a slice. Now, hearken, little cousin, I go in there—" .

"No! No!" spake I in terror, recalling in a flash the dare-devil lad who did indeed carry me pick-a-back long before; "there are

twelve men in yonder, and if they suspect you—"

"Tut! tut! 'Twill depend upon your eyes and ears! Hearken, now. I go in there, and do you take this"—and he seized my red cloak from its peg on the buttery door, the very cloak I would have burned a while before—"and when I sing out 'Ho! ho! ho!' as in laughter, do you wave this from the door toward the copse below."

For answer I took the cloak, and without a word my young soldier strode to the room beyond, and tapping his sword upon the door entered and bowed to the dragoons gathered around the table.

I slid the buttery panel ever so little, and could see without being seen. Twelve men were lounging and sending curls of smoke upward from their pipes.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said my young Sir Red Coat; "I am from the outpost this side Princeton the very truth, he having escaped from there), and on reconnoitering and seeing two coats of a well-known color emerge from the barn yonder, I surmised that I had fortunately stumbled upon an outpost—"

A chorus of voices made assent.

"Therefore I took the liberty of joining you in a mug of coffee—and in truth, from the welcome sound of your laughter, I thought to find full twenty here!"

"Twelve, sir, twelve in all," said one as they made room for him. He drew up a chair, with his back to the door by which he had entered; across the room, facing him, was a window, showing our elm tree, black against a line of bare field and evening sky, whereon the winter sunset was reflected.

At that moment my mother entered, placed a cup before the newcomer, who stood and bowed to her with much politeness. The light being in his face, I marked that my mother started in surprise, and well-nigh dropped the plate. Then she passed out, and I minded that she lighted two candles, and, albeit not dusk, she placed them on the high mantel behind Cousin Geoffrey; which again threw his face in the shadow. Then returning to the buttery, she stole to my side and whispered:

"Lois! Lois! What means this? 'Tis no

British who went in yonder, 'tis Ellery Herbert's son, with whom thee played as a child! No Herbert can turn traitor! What means it?"

But not daring to turn from my post, I could but lay a finger on my lip, to bespeak silence.

Across the table sat the British sergeant, with his arms folded; he had not spoken, but sat gazing at the newcomer, who calmly ate his crust and drank his coffee. Suddenly some one said:

"Do you bring news, sir?"

"Naught save of the mustering of Cornwallis at Princeton, and of that you are no doubt aware," said Cousin Geoffry.

"Faith, there's little of news these days," said another, "and little enough blue-coated game about, either. We've had naught to kill save time, and a few of Mistress Bradley's fowls."

"'Twere either bold or ignorant game which ventured into a snare," said my young American, "for I'll warrant 'tis known that every one of you gentlemen is a crack shot, and could carry a twig off you bough at two hundred paces!"

He motioned to the window outside which the elm showed a bare bough against the sky.

"Done, sir! I take you up!" cried one.

"Try it! try it!" cried the others. For, having supped, these men were of a mood to be easily amused.

The first British turned in his chair and aimed, then fired out the window, missing the twig. Instantly well-nigh every man had his pistol out and his head turned to the window, hence with his back to me.

"Gently, gently," spake Cousin Geoffry, coolly setting down his cup; "let us fire three times each, seeing who may be the best shot twice out of thrice."

A slight hubbub ensued, all aiming out the window and firing one after the other, whilst Cousin Geoffry made as though reloading his pistol. But there was one who did not fire. It was the sergeant. As the shots resounded he suddenly stood and raising his hand cried, "Stop!"

And my own heart stood still.

Cousin Geoffry leaned sidewise with a foot upon his chair, idly tampering with his pistol

and with the table between him and twelve men, who had gathered around the window. The sergeant extended his arm, pointing before him.

"Gentlemen, this man is but causing you to empty your pistols! I have seen him in Cadwallader's troops. He is an American," and to Cousin Geoffry he added "*Spy!*"

Cousin Geoffry raised a pistol in either hand, and I knew that the moment had come.

"An American, gentlemen—not a spy!" and louder he added, "who never dies! Ho! ho! ho!"

I dashed to the door and waved the red cloak with all my might, and lo! a burst of color broke from the copse in answer, but this time a blessed blue. Five American soldiers on horseback dashed to the house and leaped from their saddles.

"In there!" I cried, as they made by past, me and burst into the room beyond. Then flying to the buttery panel I saw that it was none too soon. These five men charged their way with such a vigor that the British who surrounded Cousin Geoffry fell back in a panic. There was a frightful hubbub, and I saw the face of Cousin Geoffry through a cloud of smoke. And then I did what doth seem a foolish thing for the daughter of a soldier. I rushed from thence and threw myself upon the kitchen settle crying, with my eyes covered:

"Oh, mother, there will be bloodshed! There will be bloodshed!"

My mother took my hand, and at the moment the British sergeant dashed outward and leaped upon a horse, with Geoffry Herbert at his very heels, and a pistol shot following him, but he got away, sending a shot backward as he disappeared. Cousin Geoffry ran back into the inner room, but presently returned, and bowed most elegantly before us; then, craving our pardon, doffed the red coat.

"I have no further use for it, Mistress Lols," he said with a twinkle, "for the eleven gentlemen in yonder were so amazed at our onslaught that they have surrendered to Colonel Reed without a murmur. Hence I shall leave the British coat as a souvenir of the color which Mistress Lols would fain not see the sun rise on."

He then described to us how, while escaping from the British, he fell in with Colonel Reed and his five gallant young Philadelphians of the light horse, who were reconnoitering near. Scenting an outpost, Geoffrey Herbert, having a red coat with him, offered to come in advance and to give the signal for attack.

"But they had full time to shoot thee first, Geoffrey!" said my mother, with a woman's anxiety.

"I was at the mercy of the only son of her father!" he said, bowing to me (and the color flamed my face, knowing that he must have heard my foolish words), but the thought struck sharply through me of how bold a man this were, who placed his life so lightly in the hand of a maid.

"But it were a brave thing for six young men to set upon twelve armed British and overcome them!"* spake my mother.

"Cousin, hath not one young American set out to overcome all Great Britain? Ay, and will do it, too!" he added, recalling to my mind the lad who would carry me pick-a-back, whether I would or not.

* Authentic.

Then he bowed to us and joined his comrades, as Colonel Reed and his five young Philadelphians marched forth into the winter sunset, with their eleven prisoners before them. And, in truth, these eleven looking so subdued that it did not seem that they could be the same red-coated rolsterers who had turned things topsy-turvy for mother and me for a week past! We stood in the door and watched them turn toward Crosswicks.

"And what shall I do with the red coat, mother?" I asked.

"Hang it in the loft, daughter. Even an enemy's color hath served a friendly purpose. Nor need thee now burn thy scarlet cloak," she added, smiling.

Nor, indeed, had I a mind to do so, for at that moment our young American soldier looked back and raised his cap, and I did wave the scarlet cloak in return.

And here Mistress Lois adds:

"I think Cousin Geoffrey Herbert to be the bravest and best-favored man in the American army—always excepting father and the General."

BALTIMORE, MD.