FOR BRAVERY ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

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I

The recruiting−office at Rivermouth was in a small, unpainted, weather− stained building on Anchor Street, not far from the custom−house. The tumble−down shell had long remained tenantless, and now, with its mouse−colored exterior, easily lent itself to its present requirements as a little military mouse−trap. In former years it had been occupied as a thread−and−needle and candy shop by one Dame Trippew. All such petty shops in the town were always kept by old women, and these old women were always styled dames. It is to be lamented that they and their innocent traffic have vanished into the unknown.

The interior of the building, consisting of one room and an attic covered by a lean−to roof, had undergone no change beyond the removal of Dame Trippew's pathetic stock at the time of her bankruptcy. The narrow counter, painted pea−green and divided in the centre by a swinging gate, still stretched from wall to wall at the farther end of the room, and behind the counter rose a series of small wooden drawers, which now held nothing but a fleeting and inaccurate memory of the lavender, and pennyroyal, and the other sweet herbs that used to be deposited in them. Even the tiny cow−bell, which once served to warn Dame Trippew of the advent of a customer, still hung from a bit of curved iron on the inner side of the street−door, and continued to give out a petulant, spasmodic jingle whenever that door was opened, however cautiously. If the good soul could have returned to the scene of her terrestrial commerce, she might have resumed business at the old stand without making any alterations whatever. Everything remained precisely as she had left it at the instant of her exit. But a wide gulf separated Dame Trippew from the present occupant of the premises. Dame Trippew's slight figure, with its crisp, snowy cap and apron, and steel−bowed spectacles, had been replaced by the stalwart personage of a sergeant of artillery in the regular army, between whose overhanging red mustache and the faint white down that had of late years come to Dame Trippew's upper lip, it would have been impossible to establish a parallel. The only things these two might have claimed in common were a slackness of trade and a liking for the aromatic Virginia leaf, though Dame Trippew had taken hers in a dainty idealistic powder, and the sergeant took his in realistic plug through the medium of an aggressive clay pipe.

In spite of the starry shield, supported by two crossed cannon cut out of tin and surmounted by the national bird in the same material, which hung proudly over the transom outside; in spite of the drummer−boy from the fort, who broke the silence into slivers at intervals throughout the day; in brief, in spite of his own martial bearing and smart uniform, the sergeant found trade very slack. At Rivermouth the war with Mexico was not a popular undertaking. If there were any heroic blood left in the old town by the sea, it appeared to be in no hurry to come forward and get itself shed. There were hours in which Sergeant O'Neil despaired of his country. But by degrees the situation brightened, recruits began to come in, and finally the town and the outlying districts chiefly the outlying districts managed to furnish a company for the State regiment. One or two prominent citizens had been lured by

commissions as officers; but neither of the two Rivermouthians who went in as privates was of the slightest civic importance. One of these men was named James Dutton.

Why on earth James Dutton wanted to go to the war was a puzzle to the few townsfolk who had any intimate acquaintance with the young man. Intimate acquaintance is perhaps too strong a term; for though Button was born in the town and had always lived there, he was more or less a stranger to those who knew him best. Comrades he had, of course, in a manner: the boys with whom he had formerly gone to the public school, and two or three maturer persons whose acquaintance he had contracted later in the way of trade. But with these he could scarcely be said to be intimate. James Dutton's rather isolated condition was not in consequence of any morbid or uncouth streak in his mental make−up. He was of a shy and gentle nature, and his sedentary occupation had simply let the habit of solitude and unsociability form a shell about him. Dutton was a shoemaker and cobbler, like his father before him, plying his craft in the shabby cottage where he was born and had lived ever since, at the foot of a narrow lane leading down to the river a lonely, doleful sort of place, enlivened with a bit of shelving sand where an ancient fisherman occasionally came to boil lobsters.

In the open lots facing the unhinged gate was an old relinquished tannery that still flavored the air with decayed hemlock and fir bark, which lay here and there in dull−red patches, killing the grass. The undulations of a colonial graveyard broke tamely against the western base of the house. Head−stones and monuments if there had ever been any monuments had melted away. Only tradition and those slowly subsiding wave−like ridges of graves revealed the character of the spot. Within the memory of man nobody had been dropped into that Dead Sea. The Duttons, father and son, had dwelt here nearly twenty−four years. They owned the shanty. The old man was now dead, having laid down his awl and lapstone just a year before the rise of those international complications which resulted in the appearance of Sergeant O'Neil in Rivermouth, where he immediately tacked up the blazoned aegis of the United States over the doorway of Dame Trippew's little shop.

As has been indicated, the war with Mexico was not looked upon with favor by the inhabitants of Rivermouth, who clearly perceived its underlying motive the extension of slave territory. The abolition element in the town had instantly been blown to a white heat. Moreover, war in itself, excepting as a defensive measure or on a point of honor, seemed rather poor business to the thrifty Rivermouthians. They were wholly of the opinion of Birdofredom Sawin, that

"Nimepunce a day fer killin' folks comes kind o' low fer murder."

That old Nehemiah Dutton's son should have any interest one way or the other in the questions involved was inconceivable, and the morning he presented himself at the recruiting−office a strong ripple of surprise ran over the group of idlers that hung day after day around the door of the crazy tenement, drawn thither by the drum−taps and a morbid sense of gunpowder in the air. These idlers were too sharp or too unpatriotic to enlist themselves, but they had unbounded enthusiasm for those who did. After a moment's hesitation, they cheered Jemmy Dutton handsomely.

On the afternoon of his enlistment, he was met near the post−office by Marcellus Palfrey, the sexton of the Old Brick Church.

"What are you up to, anyhow, Jemmy?" asked Palfrey. "What's your idee?"

"My idea is," replied Dutton, "that I've never been able to live freely and respectably, as I've wanted to live; but I mean to die like a gentleman, when it comes to that."

"What do you call a gentleman, Jemmy?"

"Well, a man who serves faithfully, and stands by to lay down his life for his duty he's a gentleman."

"That's so," said Palfrey. "He needn't have no silver−plated handles, nor much outside finish, if he's got a satin linin'. He's one of God's men."

What really sent James Dutton to the war? Had he some unformulated and hitherto unsuspected dream of military glory, or did he have an eye to supposable gold ingots piled up in the sub−basement of the halls of the Montezumas? Was it a case of despised love, or was he simply tired of re−heeling and re−soling the boots of Rivermouth folk; tired to death of the river that twice a day crept up to lap the strip of sandy beach at the foot of Nutter's Lane; tired to death of being alone, and poor, and aimless? His motive is not positively to be known, only to be guessed at. We shall not trouble ourselves about it. Neither shall the war, which for a moment casts a lurid light on his figure, delay us long. It was a tidy, comfortable little war, not without picturesque aspects. Out of its flame and smoke leaped two or three fine names that dazzled men's eyes awhile; and among the fortunate was a silent young lieutenant of infantry a taciturn, but not unamiable young lieutenant who was afterward destined to give the name of a great general into the keeping of history forever. Wrapped up somewhere in this Mexican war is the material for a brief American epic; but it is not to be unrolled and recited here.

II

With the departure of Our Country's Gallant Defenders, as they were loosely denominated by some the Idiots, as they were compactly described by others monotony again settled down upon Rivermouth. Sergeant O'Neil's heraldic emblems disappeared from Anchor Street, and the quick rattle of the tenor drum at five o'clock in the morning no longer disturbed the repose of peace−loving citizens. The tide of battle rolled afar, and its echoes were not of a quality to startle the drowsy old seaport. Indeed, it had little at stake. Only four men had gone from the town proper. One, Captain Kittery, died before reaching the seat of war; one deserted on the way; one, Lieutenant Bangs, was sent home invalided; and only James Dutton was left to represent the land force of his native town. He might as well have died or deserted, for he was promptly forgotten.

From time to time accounts of battles and bombardments were given in the columns of the Rivermouth Barnacle, on which occasions the Stars and Stripes, held in the claws of a spread eagle, decorated the editorial page a cut which until then had been used only to celebrate the bloodless victories of the ballot. The lists of dead, wounded, and missing were always read with interest or anxiety, as might happen, for one had friends and country acquaintances, if not fellow−townsmen, with the army on the Rio Grande. Meanwhile nobody took the trouble to bestow a thought on James Dutton. He was as remote and shadowy in men's memories as if he had been killed at Thermopylae or Bunker's Hill. But one day the name of James Dutton blazed forth in a despatch that electrified the community. At the storming of Chapultepec, Private James Dutton, Company K, Rivermouth, had done a very valorous deed. He had crawled back to a plateau on the heights, from which the American troops had been driven, and had brought off his captain, who had been momentarily stunned by the wind of a round−shot. Not content with that, Private Dutton had returned to the dangerous plateau, and, under a heavy fire, had secured a small field−piece which was about to fall into the hands of the enemy. Later in the day this little howitzer did eminent service. After touching on one or two other minor matters, the despatch remarked, incidentally, that Private James Dutton had had his left leg blown off.

The name of James Dutton was instantly on every lip in town. Citizens who had previously ignored his existence, or really had not been aware of it, were proud of him. The Hon. Jedd Deane said that he had. long regarded James Dutton as a young man of great promise, a er most remarkable young person, in short; one of the kind with much er latent ability. Postmaster Mugridge observed, with the strong approval of those who heard him, that young Dutton was nobody's fool, though what especial wisdom Dutton had evinced in having his leg blown off was not clear. Captain Tewksberry, commanding the local militia company, the Rivermouth Tigers, was convinced that no one who had not carefully studied Scott's Tactics could have brought away that gun under the circumstances. "Here, you will observe, was the exposed flank of the heights; there, behind the chevaux−de−frise, lay the enemy," etc., etc. Dutton's former school− fellows began to remember that there had always been

something tough and gritty in Jim Dutton. The event was one not to be passed over by Parson Wibird Hawkins, who made a most direct reference to it in his Sunday's sermon Job xxxix. 25: "He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

After the first burst of local pride and enthusiasm had exhausted itself over young Dutton's brilliant action, the grim fact connected with young Dutton's left leg began to occupy the public mind. The despatch had vaguely hinted at amputation, and had stopped there. If his leg had been shot away, was it necessary that the rest of him should be amputated? In the opinion of Schoolmaster Grimshaw, such treatment seemed almost tautological. However, all was presumably over by this time. Had poor Dutton died under the operation? Solicitude on that point was widespread and genuine. Later official intelligence relieved the stress of anxiety. Private Dutton had undergone the operation successfully and with great fortitude; he was doing well, and as soon as it was possible for him to bear transportation he was to be sent home. He had been complimented in the commanding officer's report of the action to headquarters, and General Winfield Scott had sent Private Dutton a silver medal "for bravery on the field of battle." If the Government had wanted one or two hundred volunteers from Rivermouth, that week was the week to get them.

Then intervened a long silence touching James Dutton. This meant feverish nights and weary days in hospital, and finally blissful convalescence, when the scent of the orange and magnolia blossoms blown in at the open window seemed to James Dutton a richer recompense than he deserved for his martyrdom. At last he was in condition to be put on board a transport for New Orleans. Thence a man−of−war was to convey him to Rivermouth, where the ship was to be overhauled and have its own wounds doctored.

When it was announced from the fort that the vessel bearing James Dutton had been sighted off the coast and would soon be in the Narrows, the town was thrown into such a glow of excitement as it had not experienced since the day a breathless and bedraggled man on horseback had dashed into Rivermouth with the news that the Sons of Liberty in Boston had pitched the British tea overboard. The hero of Chapultepec the only hero Rivermouth had had since the colonial period was coming up the Narrows! It is odd that three fourths of anything should be more estimable than the whole, supposing the whole to be estimable. When James Dutton had all his limbs he was lightly esteemed, and here was Rivermouth about to celebrate a fragment of him.

The normally quiet and unfrequented street leading down to the boat− landing was presently thronged by Rivermouthians men, women, and children. The arrival of a United States vessel always stirred an emotion in the town. Naval officers were prime favorites in aristocratic circles, and there were few ships in the service that did not count among their blue−jackets one or more men belonging to the port. Thus all sea−worn mariners in Uncle Sam's employ were sure of both patrician and democratic welcome at Rivermouth. But the present ship contained an especially valuable cargo.

It was a patient and characteristically undemonstrative crowd that assembled on the wharf, a crowd content to wait an hour or more without a murmur after the ship had dropped anchor in midstream for the captain's gig to be lowered from the davits. The shrill falsetto of the boatswain's whistle suddenly informed those on shore of what was taking place on the starboard side, and in a few minutes the gig came sweeping across the blue water, with James Dutton seated in the stern−sheets and looking very pale. He sat there, from time to time pulling his blond mustache, evidently embarrassed. A cheer or two rose from the wharf when the eight gleaming blades simultaneously stood upright in air, as if the movement had been performed by some mechanism. The disembarkment followed in dead silence, for the interest was too novel and too intense to express itself noisily. Those nearest to James Dutton pressed forward to shake hands with him, but this ceremony had to be dispensed with as he hobbled on his crutches through the crowd, piloted by Postmaster Mugridge to the hack which stood in waiting at the head of the wharf.

Dutton was driven directly to his own little cottage in Nutter's Lane, which had been put in order for his occupancy. The small grocery closet had been filled with supplies, the fire had been lighted in the diminutive

kitchen stove, and the tea−kettle was twittering on top, like a bird on a bough. The Twombly girls, Priscilla and Mehitabel, had set some pansies and lilacs here and there in blue china mugs, and decorated with greenery the faded daguerreotype of old Nehemiah Dutton, which hung like a slowly dissolving ghost over his ancient shoemaker's bench. As James Dutton hobbled into the contracted room where he had spent the tedious years of his youth and manhood, he had to lift a hand from one of the crutches to brush away the tears that blinded him. It was so good to be at home again!

[Illustration with caption: Held an informal reception]

That afternoon, Dutton held an informal reception. There was a constant coming and going of persons not in the habit of paying visits in so unfashionable a neighborhood as Nutter's Lane. Now and then a townsman, conscious that his unimportance did not warrant his unintroduced presence inside, lounged carelessly by the door; and through the rest of the day several small boys turned somersaults and skylarked under the window, or sat in rows on the rail fence opposite the gate. Among others came the Hon. Jedd Deane, with his most pronounced Websterian air he was always oscillating between the manner of Webster and that of Rufus Choate to pay his respects to James Dutton, which was considered a great compliment indeed. A few days later, this statesman invited Dutton to dine with him at the ancestral mansion in Mulberry Avenue, in company with Parson Wibird Hawkins, Postmaster Mugridge, and Silas Trefethen, the Collector of the Port. It was intimated that young Dutton had handled himself under this ordeal with as much self−possession and dignity as if he had always dined off colonial china, and had always stirred his after−dinner coffee with a spoon manufactured by Paul Revere.

A motion to give James Dutton a limited public banquet, at which the politicians could have a chance to unfold their eloquence, was discussed and approved by the Board of Selectmen, but subsequently laid on the table, it being reported that Mr. Dutton had declared that he would rather have his other leg blown off than make a speech. This necessarily killed the project, for a reply from him to the chairman's opening address was a sine qua non.

Life now opened up all sunshine to James Dutton. His personal surroundings were of the humblest, but it was home, sweet, sweet home. One may roam amid palaces even amid the halls of the Montezumas yet, after all, one's own imperfect drain is the best. The very leather− parings and bits of thread that had drifted from the work−bench into the front yard, and seemed to have taken root there like some strange exotic weed, were a delight to him. Dutton's inability to move about as in former years sometimes irked him, but everything else was pleasant. He resolved to make the best of this one misfortune, since without it he would never have been treated with such kindness and consideration. The constant employment he found at his trade helped him to forget that he had not two legs. A man who is obliged to occupy a cobbler's bench day after day has no special need of legs at all. Everybody brought jobs to his door, and Dutton had as much work as he could do. At times, indeed, he was forced to decline a commission. He could hardly credit his senses when this occurred.

So life ran very smoothly with him. For the first time in his existence he found himself humming or whistling an accompaniment to the rat−tat− tat of his hammer on the sole−leather. No hour of the twenty−four hung heavily on him. In the rear of the cottage was a bit of ground, perhaps forty feet square, with an old elm in the centre, under which Dutton liked to take his nooning. It was here he used to play years ago, a quiet, dreamy lad, with no companions except the squirrels. A family of them still inhabited the ancient boughs, and it amused him to remember how he once believed that the nimble brown creatures belonged to a tribe of dwarf Indians who might attempt to scalp him with their little knives if they caught him out after dusk. Though his childhood had not been happy, he had reached a bend in the road where to pause and look back was to find the retrospect full of fairy lights and coloring.

Almost every evening one or two old acquaintances, with whom he had not been acquainted, dropped in to chat with him, mainly about the war. He had shared in all the skirmishes and battles from Cerro Gordo and Molino del Rey up to the capture of Chapultepec; and it was something to hear of these matters from one who had been a part of what he saw. It was considered a favor to be allowed to examine at short range that medal "for bravery on the

field of battle." It was a kind of honor "just to heft it," as somebody said one night. There were visitors upon whom the impression was strong that General Scott had made the medal with his own hands.

James Dutton was ever modest in speaking of his single personal exploit. He guessed he didn't know what he was doing at the moment when he tumbled the howitzer into the ravine, from which the boys afterward fished it out. "You see, things were anyway up on that plateau. The copper bullets were flying like hailstones, so it didn't much matter where a fellow went he was sure to get peppered. Of course the captain couldn't be left up there we wanted him for morning parades. Then I happened to see the little field−piece stranded among the chaparral. It was a cursed nice little cannon. It would have been a blighting shame to have lost it."

"I suppose you didn't leave your heart down there along with the senoriteers, did you, Jemmy?" inquired a town Lovelace.

"No," said Dutton, always perfectly matter of fact; "I left my leg."

Ah, yes; life was very pleasant to him in those days!

Not only kindnesses, but honors were showered upon him. Parson Wibird Hawkins, in the course of an address before the Rivermouth Historical and Genealogical Society, that winter, paid an eloquent tribute to "the glorious military career of our young townsman" which was no more than justice; for if a man who has had a limb shot off in battle has not had a touch of glory, then war is an imposition. Whenever a distinguished stranger visited the town, he was not let off without the question, "Are you aware, sir, that we have among us one of the heroes of the late Mexican war?" And then a stroll about town to the various points of historic interest invariably ended at the unpretending doorstep of Dutton's cottage.

At the celebration of the first Fourth of July following his return from Mexico, James Dutton was pretty nearly, if not quite, the chief feature of the procession, riding in an open barouche immediately behind that of the Governor. The boys would have marched him all by himself if it had been possible to form him into a hollow square. From this day James Dutton, in his faded coat and battered artillery cap, was held an indispensable adjunct to all turnouts of a warlike complexion. Nor was his fame wholly local. Now and then, as time went on, some old comrade of the Army of the Rio Grande, a member perhaps of old Company K, would turn up in Rivermouth for no other apparent purpose than to smoke a pipe or so with Button at his headquarters in Nutter's Lane. If he sometimes chanced to furnish the caller with a dollar or two of "the sinews of war," it was nobody's business. The days on which these visits fell were red−letter days to James Dutton.

It was a proud moment when he found himself one afternoon sitting, at Schoolmaster Grimshaw's invitation, on the platform in the recitation− room of the Temple Grammar School sitting on the very platform with the green baize−covered table to which he had many a time marched up sideways to take a feruling. Something of the old awe and apprehension which Master Grimshaw used to inspire crept over him. There were instants when Dutton would have abjectly held out his hand if he had been told to do it. He had been invited to witness the evolutions of the graduating class in history and oratory, and the moisture gathered in his honest blue eyes when a panic−stricken urchin faltered forth

> "We were not many, we who stood
> Before the iron sleet that day."

Dutton listened to it all with unruffled gravity. There was never a more gentle hero, or one with a slighter sense of humor, than the hero of Chapultepec.

Dutton's lot was now so prosperous as to exclude any disturbing thoughts concerning the future. The idea of applying for a pension never entered his head until the subject was suggested to him by Postmaster Mugridge, a

more worldly man, an office−holder himself, with a carefully peeled eye on Government patronage. Dutton then reflected that perhaps a pension would be handy in his old age, when he could not expect to work steadily at his trade, even if he were able to work at all. He looked about him for somebody to manage the affair for him. Lawyer Penhallow undertook the business with alacrity; but the alacrity was all on his side, for there were thousands of yards of red tape to be unrolled at Washington before anything in that sort could be done. At that conservative stage of our national progress, it was not possible for a man to obtain a pension simply because he happened to know the brother of a man who knew another man that had intended to go to the war, and didn't. Dutton's claims, too, were seriously complicated by the fact that he had lost his discharge papers; so the matter dragged, and was still dragging when it ceased to be of any importance to anybody.

Whenever James Dutton glanced into the future, it was with a tranquil mind. He pictured himself, should he not fall out of the ranks, a white− haired, possibly a bald−headed old boy, sitting of summer evenings on the doorstep of his shop, and telling stories to the children the children and grandchildren of his present associates and friends. He would naturally have laid up something by that time; besides, there was his pension. Meanwhile, though he moved in a humble sphere, was not his lot an enviable one? There were long years of pleasant existence to be passed through before he reached the period of old age. Of course that would have its ailments and discomforts, but its compensations, also. It seemed scarcely predictable that the years to come held for him either great sorrows or great felicities: he would never marry, and though he might have to grieve over a fallen comrade here and there, his heart was not to be wrung by the possible death of wife or child. With the tints of the present he painted his simple future, and was content.

Sometimes the experiences of the last few years took on the semblance of a haunting dream; those long marches through a land rich with strange foliage and fruits, the enchanted Southern nights, the life in camp, the roar of battle, and that one bewildering day on the heights of Chapultepec it all seemed phantasmagoric. But there was his mutilation to assure him of the reality, and there on Anchor Street, growing grayer and more wrinkled every season, stood the little building where he had enlisted. To be sure, the shield was gone from the transom, and the spiders had stretched their reticulated barricades across the entrance; but whenever Dutton hobbled by the place, he could almost see Sergeant O'Neil leaning in an insidious attitude against the door−sill, and smoking his short clay pipe as of old. Yet as time elapsed, this figure also grew indistinct and elusive, like the rest. Possibly but this is the merest conjecture, and has bearing only on a later period possibly it may have sometimes occurred to James Dutton, in a vague way, that after all there had been something ironical and sinister in his good fortune. The very circumstance that had lifted him from his obscurity had shut him out from further usefulness in life; his one success had defeated him; he was stranded, and could do no more. If such a reflection ever came to him, no expression of it found a way to his lips.

The weeks turned themselves into months, and the months into years. Perhaps four years had passed by when clouds of a perceptible density began to gather on James Dutton's bright horizon.

The wisest of poets has told us that custom dulls the edge of appetite. One gets used to everything, even to heroes. James Dutton was beginning to lose the bloom of his novelty. Indeed, he had already lost it. The process had been so gradual, so subtile, in its working, that the final result came upon him like something that had happened suddenly. But this was not the fact. He might have seen it coming, if he had watched. One by one his customers had drifted away from him; his shop was out of the beaten track, and a fashionable boot and shoe establishment, newly sprung up in the business part of the town, had quietly absorbed his patrons. There was no conscious unkindness in this desertion. Thoughtless neglect, all the more bitter by contrast, had followed thoughtless admiration. Admiration and neglect are apt to hunt in couples. Nearly all the customers left on Dutton's hands had resolved themselves into two collateral classes, those who delayed and those who forgot to pay. That unreached pension, which flitted like an ignis fatuus the instant one got anywhere near it, would have been very handy to have just then. The want of it had come long before old age. Dutton was only twenty−nine. Yet he somehow seemed old. The indoor confinement explained his pallor, but not the deepening lines that recently began to spread themselves fan−like at the corners of his eyes.

Callers at Nutter's Lane had now become rare birds. The dwindling of his visitors had at first scarcely attracted his notice; it had been so gradual, like the rest. But at last Dutton found himself alone. The old solitude of his youth had re−knitted its shell around him. Now that he was unsustained by the likelihood of some one looking in on him, the evenings, especially the winter evenings, were long to Dutton. Owing to weak eyes, he was unable to read much, and then he was not naturally a reader. He was too proud or too shy to seek the companionship which he might have found at Meeks's drug−store. Moreover, the society there was not of a kind that pleased him; it had not pleased him in the old days, and now he saw how narrow and poor it was, having had a glimpse of the broad world. The moonlight nights, when he could sit at the window, and look out on the gleaming river and the objects on the farther shore, were bearable. Something seemed always to be going on in the old disused burying−ground; he was positive that on certain nights uncanny figures flitted from dark to dark through a broad intervening belt of silvery moonshine. A busy spot after all these years! But when it was pitch− black outside, he had no resources. His work−bench with its polished concave leather seat, the scanty furniture, and his father's picture on the wall, grew hateful to him. At an hour when the social life of the town was at its beginning, he would extinguish his melancholy tallow−dip and go to bed, lying awake until long after all the rest of the world slumbered. This lying awake soon became a habit. The slightest sound broke his sleep the gnawing of a mouse behind the mopboard, or a change in the wind; and then insomnia seized upon him. He lay there listening to the summer breeze among the elms, or to the autumn winds that, sweeping up from the sea, teased his ear with muffled accents of wrecked and drowning men.

The pay for the few jobs which came to him at this juncture was insufficient to supply many of his simple wants. It was sometimes a choice with him between food and fuel. When he was younger, he used to get all the chips and kindling he wanted from Sherburn's shipyard, three quarters of a mile away. But handicapped as he now was, it was impossible for him to compass that distance over the slippery sidewalk or through the drifted road−bed. During the particular winter here in question, James Dutton was often cold, and oftener hungry and nobody suspected it.

A word in the ear of Parson Wibird Hawkins, or the Hon. Jedd Deane, or any of the scores of kind−hearted townsfolk, would have changed the situation. But to make known his distress, to appeal for charity, to hold out his hand and be a pauper that was not in him. From his point of view, if he could have done that, he would not have been the man to rescue his captain on the fiery plateau, and then go back through that hell of musketry to get the mountain howitzer. He was secretly and justly proud of saving his captain's life and of bringing off that "cursed nice little cannon." He gloried over it many a time to himself, and often of late took the medal of honor from its imitation−morocco case, and read the inscription by the light of his flickering candle. The embossed silver words seemed to spread a lambent glow over all the squalid little cabin seemed almost to set it on fire! More than once some irrepressible small boy, prowling at night in the neighborhood and drawn like a moth by the flame of Dutton's candle, had set his eye to a crack in the door−panel and seen the shoemaker sitting on the edge of his bed with the medal in his hand.

Until within a year or eighteen months, Dutton had regularly attended the Sunday morning service at the Old Brick Church. One service was all he could manage, for it was difficult for him to mount the steep staircase leading to his seat in the gallery. That his attendance slackened and finally ceased altogether, he tried, in his own mind, to attribute to this difficulty, and not to the fact that his best suit had become so threadbare as to make him ashamed; though the congregation now seldom glanced up, as it used to do, at the organ−loft where he sat separated from the choir by a low green curtain. Thus he had on his hands the whole unemployed day, with no break in its monotony; and it often seemed interminable. The Puritan Sabbath as it then existed was not a thing to be trifled with. All temporal affairs were sternly set aside; earth came to a standstill. Dutton, however, conceived the plan of writing down in a little blank−book the events of his life. The task would occupy and divert him, and be no flagrant sin. But there had been no events in his life until the one great event; so his autobiography resolved itself into a single line on the first page

Sept. 13, 1847. Had my leg shot off.

What else was there to record, except a transient gleam of sunshine immediately after his return home, and his present helplessness and isolation?

It was one morning at the close of a particularly bitter December. The river−shore was sheathed in thicker ice than had been known for twenty years. The cold snap, with its freaks among water−pipes and window−glass and straw−bedded roots in front gardens, was a thing that was to be remembered and commented on for twenty years to come. All natural phenomena have a curious attraction for persons who live in small towns and villages. The weathercock on the spire and the barometer on the back piazza are studied as they are not studied by dwellers in cities. A habit of keen observation of trivial matters becomes second nature in rural places. The provincial eye grows as sharp as the woodsman's. Thus it happened that somebody passing casually through Nutter's Lane that morning noticed noticed it as a thing of course, since it was so that no smoke was coming out of Dutton's chimney. The observer presently mentioned the fact at the Brick Market up town, and some of the bystanders began wondering if Dutton had overslept himself, or if he were under the weather. Nobody recollected seeing him lately, and nobody recollected not seeing him; a person so seldom in the street as Dutton is not soon missed. Dr. Meeks concluded that he would look in at Nutter's Lane on the way home with his marketing. The man who had remarked the absence of smoke had now a blurred impression that the shutters of Dutton's shop−window had not been taken down. It looked as if things were not quite right with him. Two or three persons were going in Dr. Meeks's direction, so they accompanied him, and turned into Nutter's Lane with the doctor.

The shop−shutters were still up, and no feather of smoke was curling from the one chimney of Dutton's little house. Dr. Meeks rapped smartly on the door without bringing a response. After waiting a moment he knocked again, somewhat more heavily, but with like ill success. Then he tried the latch. The door was bolted.

"I think the lad must be sick," said Dr. Meeks, glancing hurriedly over his shoulder at his companions. "What shall we do?"

"I guess we'd better see if he is," said a man named Philbrick. "Let me come there," and without further words Philbrick pressed his full weight against the pine−wood panels. The rusty fastening gave way, and the door flew open. Cold as it was without, a colder breath seemed to issue from the interior. The door opened directly into the main apartment, which was Dutton's shop and sleeping−place in one. It was a lovely morning, and the sunshine, as if it had caught a glitter from the floating points of ice on the river, poured in through a rear window and flooded the room with gold. James Dutton was lying on his pallet in the farther corner. He was dead. He must have been dead several hours, perhaps two or three days. The medal lay on his breast, from which his right hand had evidently slipped. The down−like frost on the medal was so thick as to make it impossible to distinguish the words

"FOR BRAVERY ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE."