

THE GUIDING VOICE.

THERE is more than one version of the following story going about. By some an army officer is made the chief personage; by others it is given in another way. It has therefore seemed good to me to publish this true account to the world, having found the same among my grandfather's papers, which came into my possession as the eldest son of his first-born.

Without doubt some will say it is but a story. To them I say this, 'It is true. And twist it as you will by the lights of modern knowledge, it did in that day confirm two worthy Christians in their faith.'

JARVIS JOHNS TREHARNE.

'Twas but six months after I had been appointed master and commander in His Majesty's navy that, through the great drubbing received by the Danes from our brave fellows under Nelson—his many titles and honours I cannot enumerate—I was paid off from my brig 'Rover,' the Peace of Amiens having been concluded, and being now as near home as I should ever be while on active service, I betought me to post there, for I was a native of Penzance.

I was in luck to have been paid off at Plymouth, for I had but a journey of some seventy miles, whereas had the 'Rover' been ordered to Portsmouth my distance had been more like two hundred. Taking the Bodmin Road with an easy mind—for your highwayman would not find enough to keep him in horseflesh so far west—I reached Truro at noon of a fine May day, and being now but some twenty miles from home, I spurred onward.

The day changed to thunder. I had but got the length of Marazion when I could see I was in for a wetting, and, sure enough, as I reached Market Jew, in the good old town of Penzance, the first drops saluted me. Riding on, I came to the sea face, and here it came down 'cats and dogs,' so, seeing a handy archway, I reined Dobbin and sought its shelter.

The thunder crackled overhead and the green lightning flickered angrily, while the hail and rain descended ho-ho-bolus, as the saying goes. I had not stood there a minute when in rushes another wayfarer; he had been caught afoot.

'A smart storm, sir,' he said, and we got into a conversation.

I found he was a Redrath man, a student, and apparently of a religious mind.

From where we stood the bay was in sight, and among the small craft I saw a vessel which I took to be a sloop of war lying at anchor close in.

'What ship may that be, pray?' says I.

'It is His Majesty's sloop "Rainbow,"' he answered. 'She has been here now three days, and is to go on to Portsmouth. They are drunken dogs aboard, I am sorry to say.'

At that the storm cleared, and all of a sudden the downpour ceased. In the silence I heard the sloop's bell strike the hour, and, looking at my watch, found it was indeed four o'clock.

'Pray, sir, can you tell me why ten bells were struck?' says my companion.

'Ten!' answered I. 'Nay, you mistake; 'twas eight.'

'Ten sir; for I counted them.'

'Then, if that were so, you will hear them "struck back"; for that's sea usage.'

Sure enough, as I spoke came the oblate again, and I doubt not the fellow who made the mistake got a wiggling. And yet who shall say whether, indeed, God did not direct his hand? But you shall hear.

The storm had passed St. Ives way, and it was brightening over Newlyn, so, being impatient to see my dear ones, I spurred out, with a short 'Good day,' and thought no more of the matter.

With the pleasures of family converse the sweet early summer sped all too fast, especially as every one could see that the peace would not last. What! England, with an army of one hundred and sixty thousand regulars, besides her volunteers and militia, to sit quiet with Malta in possession of France, and all our colonial stations given up? Even now Bonaparte's 'consuls' were spying in all parts of England, while our small merchantmen were seized and confiscated in French ports on the smallest pretence. No. This shameful peace could not last, and so every moment at home seemed precious.

And thus it was that June passed swiftly, and nothing happened to break our peace till that night came which was to cause us admiration all our life through.

We—that is, Ether, my wife, and I—

had retired early. It was midnight, when she suddenly cried out and woke.

'Jarvis! did you hear it?' she whispered.

'I heard nothing,' answered I.

'It was as the voice of God,' she said, 'and his words were "Send thy husband post haste to Bodmin."'

'Nay, you were dreaming,' said I.

'Turn over and go to sleep,' which, unwillingly, she did.

Then I fell off myself; and woke in like manner as she had done. A man, whose face I seemed to know, stood over me and said, 'Jarvis Treharne, obey me! up instantly, and post to Bodmin!'

'I heard it!' cried I to my wife, and we both sat up, wondering greatly.

''Twas but thinking of your dream,' says I, presently, and again we lay down.

Once more the thing happened to me, and this time my wife had also dreamed again as before.

'Jarvis,' she said, with solemnity, 'it is borne in upon me that it is the voice of God calling you.'

'Nay, 'twas a man!' says I, 'and one that I know, though I cannot recall him.'

'That may be,' she answered. 'And yet it is God's voice. What will you do?'

'Do?' says I. 'Why, sleep?'

'I would post to Bodmin,' she replied.

And, indeed, I was so worked upon myself that I then and there rose and clothed myself. Then I said seriously, 'Most I indeed set out and ride these fifty miles? And even as I asked myself she voice answered me, 'Yes!'

And so, thinking still that I was on a fool's errand, I went forth, and by four in the morning was on my way, with my wife's comforting words in my ear:—

'Take the ferry, Jarvis,' she said as I rode off; 'it will save you a couple of miles.'

'Aye,' answered I, 'and gain me old Zeek's maledictions!'

But still I thought I would take that road, being the direct way; though, Zeek being a-bed, I should have to rouse him out.

What freshness there is in an early summer morn in this country of England! In many foreign climes the first rays of the sun sicken you; but here the sweet air, tempered with sea mist, unseen yet still there, is as a kiss from nature. And all heaven's birds do sing, and the smell of the

wet grass and the balm of the hedge flowers are in your nostrils, while the good horses trot along, head erect and ears cocked.

I skirted the flat, marshy land Saint Ives way, and bore to the right. When I got the ferry in sight I was struck to see Zeek there, waiting in the boat. As I rode up he hailed me.

'We're a-rl ready, Master Treharne. Thy man rode I out, ye see.'

'My man?' thought I, in wonder. And now, indeed, it seemed to me that God his hand must be guiding me.

'Aye,' I answered, 'it is a matter for hurry, Zeek.'

And, stepping aboard, we were soon across, and I on my way again, with a feeling of awe in that this mysterious voice had even wakened the ferryman, that I might not lose time.

But with all my speed it was two by the clock when I rode into Bodmin's long street and wondered why I was there. 'Tis ever a sleepy place; but this day it seemed even more so. Away further down I noticed a small crowd near the town hall, but all else was quiet.

I put my horse up, and, hearing from the hostler that the Assizes were on, I walked to the town hall, for the want of something better to do. 'Twas here the crowd stood, and I learned that within they were trying a man for a cruel murder that had been done six weeks ago, which, indeed, I had heard of at the time—Helson being the place, and the day, of all others, the one on which I had arrived home. But in the society of wife and children, after three years' absence, even murder may be forgotten, especially so by one licensed to murder the King's enemies by His Majesty's commission.

But now, being here in Bodmin, and knowing not why, I thought, 'I cannot do better than look in at the court,' at which I forced myself in with some trouble, gaining a savage frown from the judge and sundry calls of 'Silence!' from the ushers. For, indeed, I had arrived at a most solemn moment. The prisoner, whose back was toward me, was facing the dread representative of the law, who had just asked him that awful question, what he had to plead why sentence should not be now passed upon him.

'My Lord,' said the poor fellow—and, thought I, 'Where have I heard that

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