

GRANDFATHER'S TALES.

THE LEGEND OF BETSY DOWDY.

Historical Traditions of the Battle at Great Bridge.

CHAPTER XXII.

The winter of 1775 was a dark and gloomy time for the Revolutionary patriots of Eastern Carolina. Governor Tryon had left his "palace" in New Bern, secretly and hurriedly, had taken refuge on board the armed schooner "Cruizer" and was stationed at the mouth of Cape Fear River, issuing orders, fortifying the Tory feeling in the colony and inciting the slaves to servile insurrection. Lord Dunmore had been driven from Williamsburg, Va., by popular indignation, had gone down to Norfolk and entrenched himself there. From this position he was annoying the adjacent sections of Virginia by hostile raids and was expected to make incursions into the adjacent sections of Carolina. The death of John Harvey, of Perquimans county, in June 1775, had cast a gloom over the colony and especially over the northeastern counties, where his patriotism and manly virtues were best known. But the fire of liberty were kept burning. Dunmore, with a few regulars who had accompanied him in his flight from Williamsburg, Va., had ravaged Suffolk and some other places, and was preparing to extend his ravages to the Albemarle section of Carolina. Our leading men were on the alert and couriers were keeping them in close touch. John Harvey, of Perquimans, had joined his fathers across the great divide, but his mantle had fallen upon his kinsman and connection by marriage, Gen. William Skinner, of Yeopim Creek, and he was watching every movement of Dunmore. Colonel Isaac Gregory, of Camden, was hurrying with a small militia force, to join our Colonel Robert Howe, and meet the enemy at Great Bridge in Virginia. Tom Benbury, of Chowan, then Speaker of the lower house of the General Assembly, had left his luxurious home at "Benbury Hall" that overlooked Albemarle Sound, and was hurrying to join the troops under Howe, with commissary stores. Excitement ran high, and the expected invasion of the Albemarle counties, and the probable collision at Great Bridge, where Dunmore was entrenched, was the universal subject of conversation. Howe was pushing by forced marches to the aid of Virginia with some regulars and the Hertford county militia under Colonel Wynns, of that county. Public expectation was on tiptoe.

Joe Dowdy and old man Sammy Jarvis lived on the "Banks" opposite to Knott's Island. They were near neighbors and intimate friends. Early in December, 1775, Jarvis went over to the "Main" to hear the news of Colonel Howe's movement toward Great Bridge. When he returned home, late in the evening, he was greatly excited. He was impressed with the dangerous situation of the dwellers by the sea. He was constantly saying: "Dunmore and them blamed Britishers will come down the coast from Norfolk and steal all our Banks stock and burn our houses, ding 'em." After a short rest and a hasty bite of supper, old man Jarvis went over to Dowdy's to tell him the news.

Dowdy was a wrecker for the money that was in it, and a fisher for the food that was in it. He had grown rich by wrecking. He was always watching the sea. He was a devout man, always prayed for the safety of the poor sailor who was exposed to the perils of the deep, and always closed with a silent supplication that if there should be a wreck, it might be on the Currituck

beach. He had prospered in the business of a wrecker, had saved many lives and much wreckage and money. His visible store of chattels was beef cattle and banker ponies. He herded them by the hundred.

Uncle Sammy came in without ceremony and was cordially received. Well, Uncle Sammy, said Dowdy, what are the news, tell us all. Well, Joseph, said Jarvis, things is fogerty. Gregory, Colonel Isaac, is hurrying up his Camden militia to join Howe, and Tom Benbury, of Chowan, is pushing on his wagons of commissaries. If they don't reach Great Bridge in time to bear a hand in the fight, they'll hurry on to Norfolk and drive Dunmore out of the old town. But if Dunmore beats our folks at Great Bridge, then our goose is cooked, and our property is all gone, all the gold and goods saved in our hard life work, and all our cattle and marsh ponies. You don't tell me, said Dowdy. Yes, its so, just as sure as "old Tom." The only thing that can save us is Gen. Skinner, of Perquimans, and the militia, and he is too far away. We can't get word to him in time. As Jarvis said these words slowly and with emphasis, "Betsy Dowdy, Joe Dowdy's young and pretty daughter, who was present with the family, said: Uncle Sammy, do you say the Britishers will come and steal all our ponies? Yes, said he. And my black Bess, too? Yes, he answered. She replied: I'd knock 'em in the head with a conch shell first. Betsy soon left the room. She went to the herding pen, and Black Bess was not there. She then went to the marsh and called aloud: Bess, Bessie, Black Beauty. The pretty pony heard the old familiar voice and came to the call. Betsy took her by her silken mane, led her to the shelter, went into the house, brought out a blanket and also a small pouch of coin. She placed the blanket on the round back of the pony, sprang into the soft seat and galloped over the hills and far away on her perilous journey. Down the beach she went, Black Bess doing her accustomed work. She reached the point opposite Church's Island, dashed into the shallow ford of Currituck sound, and reached the shore of the Island. On they sped, Black Bess gaining new impulse from every kind and gentle word of Betsy. The wonderful endurance of the banker pony never failed and Black Bess needed no spur but the cheering word of her rider. Bessie, pretty Bess, my black, sleek beauty, the British thieves shan't have you. We are going after General Skinner and his militia. They'll beat 'em off of you. She almost sang to the docile pony as they went on their journey. Through the divide, on through Camden, the twinkling stars her only light, over Gid. Lamb's old ferry, into Pasquotank, by the "Narrows," (now Elizabeth City) to Hartsford ford, up the highlands of Perquimans, on to Yeopim Creek, and General Skinner's hospitable home was reached. The morning sun was gilding the tree tops, when

she entered the gate. She was hospitably welcomed and when she briefly told the story of her coming cordial kindness followed. The General's daughter's, the toast of the Albemarle, Dolly, Penelope and Lavinia, made her at home. He listened to her tale of danger and promised assistance.

Middy came and with it Betsy's kind farewell. Filial duty bade her and she hid her home. As she neared her sea girt shore the notes of victory were in the air. They are beaten, beaten, they are beaten at Great Bridge! The reports materialized as she went. The battle at Great Bridge had been fought and won Howe had assumed command of the Virginia and Carolina troops upon his arrival and was in hot pursuit of Dunmore toward Norfolk, where, after a short resistance, Norfolk was evacuated by the British troops, who sought refuge on board their ships, where after a few cannon shots into the town, they departed for parts unknown.

Then, and long after, by bivouac and camp fire and in patriotic homes was told the story of Betsy Dowdy's Ride.

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WAR AND RUMORS OF WAR.

The public mind in every nook and corner of the United States is under the utmost tension. The Maine catastrophe is the one great mystery and excitement, that just now absorbs the American mind. We are all oppressed with the deep sense of sorrow and suffering connected with the explosion of the Maine in the harbor of Havana. The sacrifice of human life is terrible and irreparable. It is almost without parallel in naval history. Much of that human life that has been sacrificed had other human lives dependent upon it for support and happiness. This calamity is irreparable. Then there comes in the immense sacrifice of property, reaching far into the millions. And next to these the question of national honor is involved. Was it incendiary and was the incendiary of individual or national origin? Was the explosion of the battleship Maine accidental or designed? Was it an individual wrong, arising from private antipathy to the United States government and people, or was it a wrong perpetrated with the knowledge, connivance or complicity of the authorities? If a private and individual wrong to gratify malevolence, and without the knowledge or participation of the Spanish authorities, can Spain be held responsible for the vandalism?

The Navy Department of our government is now engaged in investigating the whole complicated subject. A special commission of naval officers are now in the harbor of Havana, with a number of divers. It is examining the wreck with judicial carefulness, and upon their decision, after a thorough investigation, will hang momentous destinies. Perhaps it may be war with Spain, perhaps accident will hang at the end of their decision, perhaps mystery unexplained will be the end of it, and it may be private malevolence with which Spain had no connection.

At present, the theory of Spain's responsibility for the horrible calamity gains more strength, and it must be confessed there is some ground for the suspicion that the name of Spain is involved in the atrocity. To our mind the grounds are sufficient and reasonable grounds. The sensitiveness of the Spanish authorities upon the subject is a suspicious circumstance. Innocence is slow in the vindication of its innocence and is generally lethargic under suspicion. Guilt is its own accuser, sayeth the proverb. The Spanish authorities and the Spanish population in Havana were under an intense strain of indignation against the United States government and people, before the bat-

tle-ship Maine arrived in the harbor, and when she arrived with her formidable equipment, it was regarded as a threat to Havana, and the indignation of the authorities of Spain and the population was greatly intensified. That indignation found vent in intemperate language in public places, and in predictions of evil to the battleship, when she came. It is natural to conclude that the thought was father to the deed.

The private letters from the crew to their friends in the States, published since the calamity, but written before that dire event, nearly all express the feeling of danger to the ship and speak of the feeling toward them and the opportunities of damage from torpedoes. They speak of the danger as imminent and express their opinion that they might be "blown up" at any moment. Such unanimity could not have been an idle fear without some foundation of fact. These were indications, straws, as it were, before the explosion, to sustain the theory of criminality. But there were other occurrences, since the event, that are cumulative in support of the same theory. The general aspect of the Spanish population was not one of sorrow. The funeral ceremonies of the soldiers were attended by the very poor in Havana, wearing the sable black of sorrow, but the Spaniards were generally arrayed in holiday attire. No Spanish ships in the harbor floated the flags at half-mast. We shall see what we will see.

Oh, noble ship Maine, it can't be true That we no more thy glories shall view. 'Tis it be true that thy noble men Shall never grace thy decks again? Oh, sad indeed has been thy fate. We weep for thy noble crew. And many an eye will watch and wait For their loved ones who wore the blue.

Toll the bell softly o'er and o'er, Toll the bells softly from shore to shore, As we weep for thy crew, noble old Maine, And fear we shall ne'er see thy colors again.

Oh, if on to-morrow the truth comes to light That thy glories were sunk by a spy in the night, We'll then revenge thee, we'll fight till we die, A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye. Our country doth mourn thee, our grand noble Maine, And we sigh as we think we'll ne'er see thee again, But the saddest of all is the loss of thy crew, Our brave, noble sailors who wore the blue.

The hearts of thy people are sad at thy fate, Especially thy birthplace, old New York, and the States, All over the country are hearts bleeding and torn, As o'er the loss of a husband or brother they mourn. It may be we shall never the truth un-discard, For treachery is hidden in Havana's land, But while they rejoice at what they call gain, We will weep, sadly weep, for the crew of the Maine.

Oh, seek out a spot in some shady grove, And bury them tenderly, the boys that we love, And think of their friends who cannot bear And for their dear sake just shed one sad tear. Let them rest there in peace, the Maine's noble crew, We will leave them with God, noble crew of the Maine.

—Alice A. Russell.

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