

Eggleston George Cary

# A Captain in the Ranks: A Romance of Affairs



George Eggleston

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# **Eggleston George Cary A Captain in the Ranks: A Romance of Affairs**

## **PREFACE**

This story is intended to supplement the trilogy of romances in which I have endeavored to show forth the Virginian character under varying conditions.

"Dorothy South" dealt with Virginia life and character before the Confederate war.

"The Master of Warlock" had to do with the Virginians during the early years of the war, when their struggle seemed hopeful of success.

"Evelyn Byrd" was a study of the same people as they confronted certain disaster and defeat.

The present story is meant to complete the picture. It deals with that wonderful upbuilding of the great West which immediately followed the war, and in which the best of the young Virginians played an important part.

The personages of the story are real, and its events are mainly facts, thinly veiled.

# I

## The Final Fight

The slender remnant of Lee's artillery swung slowly into position a few miles west of Appomattox Court House. Wearily – but with spirit still – the batteries parked their guns in a field facing a strip of woodland. The guns were few in number now, but they were all that was left of those that had done battle on a score of historic fields.

Lee had been forced out of his works at Richmond and Petersburg a week before. Ever since, with that calm courage which had sustained him throughout the later and losing years of the war, he had struggled and battled in an effort to retreat to the Roanoke River. He had hoped there to unite the remnant of his army with what was left of Johnston's force, and to make there a final and desperate stand.

In this purpose he had been baffled. Grant's forces were on his southern flank, and they had steadily pressed him back toward the James River on the north. In that direction there was no thoroughfare for him. Neither was there now in any other. Continual battling had depleted his army until it numbered now scarcely more than ten thousand men all told, and starvation had weakened these so greatly that only the heroism of despair enabled them to fight or to march at all.

The artillery that was parked out there in front of Appomattox Court House was only a feeble remnant of that which had fought so long and so determinedly. Gun after gun had been captured. Gun after gun had been dismounted in battle struggle. Caisson after caisson had been blown up by the explosion of shells striking them.

Captain Guilford Duncan, at the head of eleven mounted men, armed only with sword and pistols, paused before entering the woodlands in front. He looked about in every direction, and, with an eye educated by long experience in war, he observed the absence of infantry support.

He turned to Sergeant Garrett, who rode by his side, and said sadly:

"Garrett, this means surrender. General Lee has put his artillery here to be captured. The end has come."

Then dismounting, he wearily threw himself upon the ground, chewed and swallowed a few grains of corn, – the only rations he had, – and sought a brief respite of sleep. But before closing his eyes he turned to Garrett and gave the command:

"Post a sentinel and order him to wake us when Sheridan comes."

This command brought questions from the men about him. They were privates and he was their captain, it is true, but the Southern army was democratic, and these men were accustomed to speak with their captain with eyes on a level with his own.

"Why do you say, 'when Sheridan comes'?" asked one of Duncan's command.

"Oh, he will come, of course – and quickly. That is the program. This artillery has been posted here to be captured. And it will be captured within an hour or two at furthest, perhaps within a few minutes, for Sheridan is sleepless and his force is not only on our flank, but in front of us. There is very little left of the Army of Northern Virginia. It can fight no more. It is going to surrender here, but in the meantime there may be a tidy little scrimmage in this strip of woods, and I for one want to have my share in it. Now let me go to sleep and wake me when Sheridan comes."

In a minute the captain was asleep. So were all his men except the sentinel posted to do the necessary waking.

That came all too quickly, for at this juncture in the final proceedings of the war Sheridan was vigorously carrying out Grant's laconic instruction to "press things." When the sentinel waked the captain, Sheridan's lines were less than fifty yards in front and were pouring heavy volleys into the unsupported Confederate artillery park.

Guilford Duncan and his men were moved to no excitement by this situation. Their nerves had been schooled to steadiness and their minds to calm under any conceivable circumstances by four years of vastly varied fighting. Without the slightest hurry they mounted their horses in obedience to Duncan's brief command. He led them at once into the presence of Colonel Cabell, whose battalion of artillery lay nearest to him. As they sat upon their horses in the leaden hailstorm, with countenances as calm as if they had been entering a drawing room, Duncan touched his cap to Colonel Cabell and said:

"Colonel, I am under nobody's orders here. I have eleven men with me, all of them, as you know, as good artillerymen as there are in the army. Can you let us handle some guns for you?"

"No," answered Colonel Cabell; "I have lost so many guns already that I have twenty men to each piece." Then, after a moment's pause, he added:

"You, Captain, cannot fail to understand what all this means."

"I quite understand that, Colonel," answered Duncan, "but as I was in at the beginning of this war, I have a strong desire to be in at the end of it."

The Colonel's cannon were firing vigorously by this time at the rate of six or eight shots to the minute from each gun, but he calmly looked over the little party on horseback and responded:

"You have some good horses there, and this is April. You will need your horses in your farming operations. You had better take them and your men out of here. You can do no good by staying. This fight is a formality pure and simple, a preliminary to the final surrender."

"Then you order me to withdraw?" asked Duncan.

"Yes, certainly, and peremptorily if you wish, though you are not under my command," answered Colonel Cabell. "It is the best thing you can do for yourself, for your men, for your horses, and for the country."

Duncan immediately obeyed the order, in a degree at least. He promptly withdrew his men to the top of a little hillock in the rear and there watched the progress of the final fight. His nerves were all a-quiver. He was a young man, twenty-five years old perhaps, full of vigor, full of enthusiasm, full of fight. He was a trifle less than six feet high, with a lithe and symmetrical body, lean almost to emaciation by reason of arduous service and long starvation. He had a head that instantly attracted attention by its unusual size and its statuesque shape. He was bronzed almost to the complexion of a mulatto, but without any touch of yellow in the bronze. He was dark by nature, of intensely nervous temperament, and obviously a man capable of enormous determination and unfaltering endurance.

He had not yet lost the instinct of battle, and it galled him that he must sit idly there on his horse, with his men awaiting his orders, simply observing a fight in which he strongly desired to participate. He could see the Federal lines gradually closing in upon both flanks of the artillery, with the certainty that they must presently envelop and capture it. Seasoned soldier that he was, he could not endure the thought of standing still while such a work of war was going on.

Seeing the situation he turned to his men, who were armed only with swords and pistols, and in a voice so calm that it belied his impulse, he said to them:

"This is our last chance for a fight, boys. I am going into the middle of that mix! Anybody who chooses to follow me can come along!"

Every man in that little company of eleven had two pistols in his saddle holsters and two upon his hips, and every man carried in addition a heavy cavalry saber capable of doing execution at close quarters. They were gentlemen soldiers, all. The cause for which they had battled for four long years was as dear to them now as it ever had been. More important still, their courage was as unflinching in this obvious climax and catastrophe of the war they had waged, as it had been at Bull Run in the beginning of that struggle, or in the Seven Days' Fight, or at Fredericksburg, or Chancellorsville, or Gettysburg, or Cold Harbor. Duncan had not doubted their response for one moment, and he was not disappointed in the vigor with which they followed him as he led them into this final fight. As they dashed forward their advance was quickly discovered by the alert enemy,

and a destructive fire of carbines was opened upon them. At that moment they were at the trot. Instantly Duncan gave the commands:

"Gallop! Charge!"

With that demoniacal huntsman's cry which is known in history as the "Rebel Yell," the little squad dashed forward and plunged into the far heavier lines of the enemy. There was a detached Federal gun there doing its work. It was a superb twelve-pounder, and Duncan's men quickly captured it with its limber-chest. Instantly dismounting, and without waiting for orders from him, they turned it upon the enemy with vigorous effect. But they were so fearfully over-matched in numbers that their work endured for scarcely more than a minute. They fired a dozen shots, perhaps, but they were speedily overwhelmed, and in another instant Duncan ordered them to mount and retire again, firing Parthian shots from their pistols as they went.

When he again reached the little hill to which he had retired at the beginning of the action, Duncan looked around him and saw that only seven of his eleven men remained. The other four had paid a final tribute of their lives to what was now obviously "The Lost Cause."

By this time the fight was over, and practically all that remained of the artillery of the Army of Northern Virginia was in possession of the enemy.

But that enemy was a generous one, and, foreseeing as it did the surrender that must come with the morning, it made no assault upon this wandering squad of brave but beaten men, who were sadly looking upon the disastrous end of the greatest war in human history.

Captain Duncan's party were on a bald hill within easy range of the carbines of Sheridan's men, but not a shot was fired at them, and not so much as a squad was sent out to demand their surrender.

Night was now near at hand and Guilford Duncan turned to his men and said:

"The war is practically over, I suppose; but I for one intend to stick to the game as long as it lasts. General Lee will surrender his army to-night or to-morrow morning, but General Johnston still has an army in the field in North Carolina. It is barely possible that we may get to him. It is my purpose to try. How many of you want to go with me?"

The response was instantaneous and unanimous.

"We'll all stick by you, Captain, 'till the cows come home," they cried.

"Very well," he answered. "We must march to James River to-night and cross it. We must make our way into the mountains and through Lynchburg, if possible, into North Carolina. We'll try, anyhow."

All night long they marched. They secured some coarse food-stuffs at a mill which they passed on their way up into the mountains. There for a week they struggled to make their way southward, fighting now and then, not with Federal troops, for there were none there, but with marauders. These were the offscourings of both armies, and of the negro population of that region. They made themselves the pests of Virginia at that time. Their little bands consisted of deserters from both armies, dissolute negroes, and all other kinds of "lewd fellows of the baser sort." They raided plantations. They stole horses. They terrorized women. They were a thorn in the flesh of General Grant's officers, who were placed in strategic positions to prevent the possible occurrence of a guerrilla warfare, and who therefore could not scatter their forces for the policing of a land left desolate and absolutely lawless.

In many parts of the country which were left without troops to guard them, at a time when no civil government existed, these marauders played havoc in an extraordinary way. But the resoluteness of General Grant's administration soon suppressed them. Whenever he caught them he hanged or shot them without mercy, and with small consideration for formalities. In the unprotected districts he authorized the ex-Confederates, upon their promise to lend aid against the inauguration of guerrilla warfare, to suppress them on their own account, and they did so relentlessly.



During the sojourn in the mountains, in his effort to push his way through to Johnston, Guilford Duncan came upon a plantation where only women were living in the mansion house. A company of these marauders had taken possession of the plantation, occupying its negro cabins and terrorizing the population of the place. When Duncan rode up with his seven armed men he instantly took command and assumed the *rôle* of protector. First of all he posted his men as sentries for the protection of the plantation homestead. Next he sent out scouts, including a number of trusty negroes who belonged upon the plantation, to find out where the marauders were located, and what their numbers were, and what purpose they might seem bent upon. From the reports of these scouts he learned that the marauders exceeded him in force by three to one, or more, but that fact in no way appalled him. During a long experience in war he had learned well the lesson that numbers count for less than morale, and that with skill and resoluteness a small force may easily overcome and destroy a larger one.

He knew now that his career as a Confederate soldier was at an end. Federal troops had occupied Lynchburg and all the region round about, thus completely cutting him off from any possibility of reaching General Johnston in North Carolina. He had no further mission as a military officer of the Southern Confederacy, but as a mere man of courage and vigor he had before him the duty of defending the women and children of this Virginia plantation against about the worst and most desperate type of highwaymen who ever organized themselves into a force for purposes of loot and outrage.

He sent at once for the best negroes on the plantation – the negroes who had proved themselves loyal in their affection for their mistresses throughout the war. Having assembled these he inquired of the women what arms and ammunition they had. There were the usual number of shotguns belonging to a plantation, and a considerable supply of powder and buckshot. Duncan assembled the negroes in the great hall of the plantation house and said to them:

"I have seven men here, all armed and all fighters. I have arms enough for you boys if you are willing to join me in the defense of the ladies on this plantation against about the worst set of scoundrels that ever lived on earth."

Johnny, the head dining-room servant, speaking for all the rest, replied:

"In co'se we is. Jest you lead us, mahstah, and you'll see how we'll do de wu'k."

Then Duncan armed the negroes, every one of whom knew how to use a gun, so that he needed not instruct them, and he led them forth with his own seasoned soldiers at their head.

"Now then," he said, "we are going to attack these fellows, and you know perfectly well that they are a lot of cowards, and sneaks, and scoundrels. If we are all resolute we can whip them out of their boots within a few minutes. Either we must do that, or they will whip us out of our boots and destroy us. I do not think there is much doubt about which is going to whip. Come along, boys."

The marauders had established themselves in four or five of the negro quarters on the plantation, and in a certain sense they were strongly fortified. That is to say, they were housed in cabins built of logs too thick for any bullet to penetrate them. Four of these cabins were so placed that a fire from the door and the windows of either of them would completely command the entrance of each of the others. But to offset that, and to offset also the superiority of numbers which the marauders enjoyed, Guilford Duncan decided upon an attack by night. He knew that he was outnumbered by two or three to one, even if he counted the willing but untrained negroes whom he had enlisted in this service. But he did not despair of success. It was his purpose to dislodge the marauders in a night attack, when he knew that they could not see to shoot with effect. He knew also that "He is thrice armed who knows his quarrel just."

Cautioning his men to maintain silence, and to advance as quickly as possible, he got them into position and suddenly rushed upon the first of the four or five negro quarters. Knowing that the door of this house would be barricaded, he had instructed some of the negroes to bring a pole with them which might be used as a battering ram. With a rush but without any hurrah, – for Duncan

had ordered quiet as a part of his plan of campaign, – the negroes carried the great pole forward and instantly crushed in the door. Within ten seconds afterwards Duncan's ex-Confederate soldiers, with their pistols in use, were within the house, and the company of marauders there surrendered – those of them who had not fallen before the pistol shots. This first flush of victory encouraged the negroes under his command so far that what had been their enthusiasm became a positive battle-madness. Without waiting for orders from him they rushed with their battering ram upon the other houses occupied by the marauders, as did also his men, who were not accustomed to follow, but rather to lead, and within a few minutes all of those negro huts were in his possession, and all their occupants were in effect his prisoners.

At this moment Guilford Duncan, who had now no legal or military authority over his men, lost control of them. Both the negroes and the white men seemed to go mad. They recognized in the marauders no rights of a military kind, no title to be regarded as fighting men, and no conceivable claim upon their conquerors' consideration. Both the negroes and the white men were merciless in their slaughter of the marauding highwaymen. Once, in the *mêlée*, Guilford Duncan endeavored to check their enthusiasm as a barbarity, but his men responded in quick, bullet-like words, indicating their idea that these men were not soldiers entitled to be taken prisoners, but were beasts of prey, rattlesnakes, mad dogs, enemies of the human race, whose extermination it was the duty of every honest man to seek and to accomplish as quickly as possible.

This thought was conveyed rather in ejaculations than in statements made, and Guilford Duncan saw that there was neither time nor occasion for argument. The men under his command felt that they were engaged in defending the lives and the honor of women and children, and they were in no degree disposed to hesitate at slaughter where so precious a purpose inspired them. Their attitude of mind was uncompromising. Their resolution was unalterable. Their impulse was to kill, and their victims were men of so despicable a kind that after a moment's thought Guilford Duncan's impulse was to let his men alone.

The contest lasted for a very brief while. The number of the slaughtered in proportion to the total number of men engaged was appalling. But this was not all. To it was immediately added the hasty hanging of men to the nearest trees, and Guilford Duncan was powerless to prevent that. The negroes, loyal to the mistresses whom they had served from infancy, had gone wild in their enthusiasm of defense. They ran amuck, and when the morning came there was not one man of all those marauders left alive to tell the story of the conflict.

In the meanwhile Guilford Duncan, by means of his men, had gathered information in every direction. He knew now that all hope was gone of his joining Johnston's army, even if that army had not surrendered, as by this time it probably had done. He therefore brought his men together. Most of them lived in those mountains round about, or in the lower country east of them, and so he said to them:

"Men, the war is over. Most of you, as I understand it, live somewhere near here, or within fifty miles of here. As the last order that I shall ever issue as a captain, I direct you now to return to your homes at once. My advice to you is to go to work and rebuild your fortunes as best you can. We've had our last fight. We've done our duty like men. We must now do the best that we can for ourselves under extremely adverse circumstances. Go home. Cultivate your fields. Take care of your families, and be as good citizens in peace as you have been good soldiers in war."

There was a hurried consultation among the men. Presently Sergeant Garrett spoke for the rest and said:

"We will not go home, Captain Duncan, until each one of us has written orders from you to do so. Some of us fellows have children in our homes, and the rest of us may have children hereafter. We want them to know, as the years go by, that we did not desert our cause, even in its dying hours, that we did not quit the army until we were ordered to quit. We ask of you, for each of us, a written order to go home, or to go wherever else you may order us to go."

The Captain fully understood the loyalty of feeling which underlay this request, and he promptly responded to it. Taking from his pocket a number of old letters and envelopes, he searched out whatever scraps there might be of blank paper. Upon these scraps he issued to each man of his little company a peremptory order to return to his home, with an added statement in the case of each that he had "served loyally, bravely, and well, even unto the end."

That night, before their final parting, the little company slept together in the midst of a cluster of pine trees, with only one sentry on duty.

The next day came the parting. The captain, with tears dimming his vision, shook hands with each of his men in turn, saying to each, with choking utterance: "Good-by! God bless you!"

Then the spokesman of the men, Sergeant Garrett, asked:

"Are you going home, Captain Duncan?"

For twenty seconds the young Captain stared at his men, making no answer. Then, mastering himself, and speaking as one dazed, he replied:

"Home? Home? On all God's earth I have no home!"

Instantly he put spurs to his horse, half unconsciously turning toward the sunset.

A moment later he vanished from view, over the crest of a hill.

## II

### Alone in the High Mountains

The young man rode long and late that night. His way lay always upward toward the crests of the high mountains of the Blue Ridge Range.

The roads he traversed were scarcely more than trails – too steep in their ascent to have been traveled by wagons that might wear them into thoroughfares. During the many hours of his riding he saw no sign of human habitation anywhere, and no prospect of finding food for himself or his horse, though both were famishing.

About midnight, however, he came upon a bit of wild pasture land on a steep mountain side, where his horse at least might crop the early grass of the spring. There he halted, removed his saddle and bridle, and turned the animal loose, saying:

"Poor beast! You will not stray far away. There's half an acre of grass here, with bare rocks all around it. Your appetite will be leash enough to keep you from wandering."

Then the young man – no longer a captain now, but a destitute, starving wanderer on the face of the earth – threw himself upon a carpet of pine needles in a little clump of timber, made a pillow of his saddle, drew the saddle blanket over his shoulders to keep out the night chill, loosened his belt, and straightway fell asleep.

Before doing so, however, – faint with hunger as he was, and weary to the verge of collapse, – he had a little ceremony to perform, and he performed it – in answer to a sentimental fancy. With the point of his sword he found an earth-bank free of rock, and dug a trench there. In it he placed his sword in its scabbard and with its belt and sword-knot attached. Then drawing the earth over it and stamping it down, he said:

"That ends the soldier chapter of my life. I must turn to the work of peace now. I have no fireplace over which to hang the trusty blade. It is better to bury it here in the mountains in the midst of desolation, and forever to forget all that it suggests."

When he waked in the morning a soaking, persistent, pitiless rain was falling. The young man's clothing was so completely saturated that, as he stood erect, the water streamed from his elbows, and he felt it trickling down his body and his legs.

"This is a pretty good substitute for a bath," he thought, as he removed his garments, and with strong, nervous hands, wrung the water out of them as laundresses do with linen.

He had no means of kindling a fire, and there was no time for that at any rate. Guilford Duncan had begun to feel the pangs not of mere hunger, but of actual starvation – the pains that mean collapse and speedy death. He knew that he must find food for himself and that quickly. Otherwise he must die there, helpless and alone, on the desolate mountain side.

He might, indeed, kill his horse and live for a few days upon its flesh, until it should spoil. But such relief would be only a postponing of the end, and without the horse he doubted that he could travel far toward that western land which he had half unwittingly fixed upon as his goal.

He was well up in the mountains now, and near the crest of the great range. The Valley lay beyond, and he well knew that he would find no food supplies in that region when he should come to cross it. Sheridan had done a perfect work of war there, so devastating one of the most fruitful regions on all God's earth that in picturesque words he had said: "The crow that flies over the Valley of Virginia must carry his rations with him."

In the high mountains matters were not much better. There had been no battling up there in the land of the sky, but the scars and the desolation of war were manifest even upon mountain sides and mountain tops.

For four years the men who dwelt in the rude log cabins of that frost-bitten and sterile region had been serving as volunteers in the army, fighting for a cause which was none of theirs and which they did not at all understand or try to understand. They fought upon instinct alone. It had always been the custom of the mountain dwellers to shoulder their guns and go into the thick of every fray which seemed to them in any way to threaten their native land. They went blindly, they fought desperately, and they endured manfully. Ignorant, illiterate, abjectly poor, inured to hardship through generations, they asked no questions the answers to which they could not understand. It was enough for them to know that their native land was invaded by an armed foe. Whenever that occurred they were ready to meet force with force, and to do their humble mightiest to drive that foe away or to destroy him, without asking even who he was.

It had been so in all the Indian wars and in the Revolutionary struggle, and it was so again in the war between the States. As soon as the call to arms was issued, these sturdy mountaineers almost to a man abandoned their rocky and infertile fields to the care of their womankind and went to war, utterly regardless of consequences to themselves.

During this last absence of four years their homes had fallen into fearful desolation. Those homes were log cabins, chinked and daubed, mostly having earthen floors and chimneys built of sticks thickly plastered with mud. But humble as they were, they were homes and they held the wives and children whom these men loved.

All that was primitive in American life survived without change in the high mountains of Virginia and the Carolinas. In the Piedmont country east of the Blue Ridge, and in the tide-water country beyond, until the war came there were great plantations, where wealthy, or well-to-do, and highly educated planters lived in state with multitudinous slaves to till their fertile fields.

West of the Blue Ridge and between that range and the Alleghenies lay the Valley of Virginia, a land as fruitful as Canaan itself.

In that Valley there dwelt in simple but abundant plenty the sturdy "Dutchmen," as they were improperly called, – men of German descent, – who had pushed their settlements southward from Pennsylvania along the Valley, establishing themselves in the midst of fertile fields, owning few slaves, and tilling their own lands, planting orchards everywhere, and building not only their houses, but their barns and all their outbuildings stoutly of the native stone that lay ready to their hands.

That region was now as barren as Sahara by reason of the devastation that Sheridan had inflicted upon it with the deliberate and merciless strategic purpose of rendering it uninhabitable and in that way making of it a no-thoroughfare for Confederate armies on march toward the country north of the Potomac, or on the way to threaten Washington City.

The little mountain homesteads had been spared this devastation. But their case was not much better than that of the more prosperous plantations on the east, or that of the richly fruitful Valley farms on the west. In war it is not "the enemy" alone who lays waste. Such little cribs and granaries and smoke houses as these poor mountain dwellers owned had been despoiled of their stores to feed the armies in the field. Their boys, even those as young as fourteen, had been drawn into the army. Their hogs, their sheep, and the few milch cows they possessed, had been taken away from them. Their scanty oxen had been converted into army beef, and those of them who owned a horse or a mule had been compelled to surrender the animal for military use, receiving in return only Confederate treasury notes, now worth no more than so much of waste paper.

Nevertheless Guilford Duncan perfectly understood that he must look to the impoverished people of the high mountains for a food supply in this his sore extremity. Therefore, instead of crossing the range by way of any of the main-traveled passes, he pushed his grass-refreshed steed straight up Mount Pleasant to its topmost heights.

There, about noon, he came upon a lonely cabin whose owner had reached home from the war only a day or two earlier.

There was an air of desolation and decay about the place, but knowing the ways of the mountaineers the young man did not despair of securing some food there. For even when the mountaineer is most prosperous his fences are apt to be down, his roof out of repair, and all his surroundings to wear the look of abandonment in despair.

Duncan began by asking for dinner for himself and his horse, and the response was what he expected in that land of poverty-stricken but always generous hospitality.

"Ain't got much to offer you, Cap'n'," said the owner, "but sich as it is you're welcome."

Meanwhile he had given the horse a dozen ears of corn, saying:

"Reckon 't won't hurt him. He don't look 's if he'd been a feedin' any too hearty an' I reckon a dozen ears won't founder him."

For dinner there was a scanty piece of bacon, boiled with wild mustard plants for greens, and some pones of corn bread.

To Guilford Duncan, in his starving condition, this seemed a veritable feast. The eating of it so far refreshed him that he cheerfully answered all the questions put to him by his shirt-sleeved host.

It is a tradition in Virginia that nobody can ask so many questions as a "Yankee," and yet there was never a people so insistently given to asking questions of a purely and impertinently personal character as were the Virginians of anything less than the higher and gentler class. They questioned a guest, not so much because of any idle curiosity concerning his affairs, as because of a friendly desire to manifest interest in him and in what might concern him.

"What mout your name be, Cap'n?" the host began, as they sat at dinner.

"My name is Guilford Duncan," replied the young man. "But I am not a Captain now. I'm only a very poor young man – greatly poorer than you are, for at least you own a home and a little piece of the mountain top, while I own no inch of God's earth or anything else except my horse, my four pistols, my saddle and bridle and the clothes I wear."

"What's your plan? Goin' to settle in the mountings? They say there'll be big money in 'stillin' whisky an' not a-payin' of the high tax on it. It's a resky business, or will be, when the Yanks get their-selves settled down into possession, like; but I kin see you're game fer resks, an' ef you want a workin' pardner, I'm your man. There's a water power just a little way down the mounting, in a valley that one good man with a rifle kin defend."

"Thank you for your offer," answered Duncan. "But I'm not thinking of settling in the mountains. I'm going to the West, if I can get there. Now, to do that, I must cross the Valley, and I must have some provisions. Can you sell me a side of bacon, a little bag of meal, and a little salt?"

"What kin you pay with, Mister?"

"Well, I have no money, of course, except worthless Confederate paper, but I have two pairs of Colt's 'Navy Six' revolvers, and I'd be glad to give you one pair of them for my dinner, my horse's feed, and the provisions I have mentioned."

"Now look-a-here, Mister," broke in the mountaineer, rising and straightening himself to his full height of six feet four. "When you come to my door you was mighty hungry. You axed fer a dinner an' a hoss feed, an' I've done give 'em to you, free, gratis, an' fer nothin'. No man on the face o' God's yearth kin say as how he ever come to Si Watkins's house in need of a dinner an' a hoss feed 'thout a gittin' both. An' no man kin say as how Si Watkins ever took a cent o' pay fer a entertainin' of angels unawares as the preachers says. Them's my *principles*, an' when you offer to pay fer a dinner an' a hoss feed, you insults my *principles*."

"I sincerely beg your pardon," answered Duncan hurriedly. "I am very grateful indeed for your hospitality, and as a Virginian I heartily sympathize with your sentiment about not taking pay for food and lodging, but –"

"That's all right, Mister. You meant fa'r an' squa'r. But you know how it is. Chargin' fer a dinner an' a hoss feed is low down Yankee business. Tavern keepers does it, too, but Si Watkins ain't no tavern keeper an' he ain't no Yankee, neither. So that's the end o' that little skirmish. But

when it comes to furnishin' you with a side o' bacon an' some meal an' salt, that's more differenter. That's business. There's mighty little meal an' mighty few sides o' bacon in these here parts, but I don't mind a-tellin' you as how my wife's done managed to hide a few sides o' bacon an' a little meal from the fellers what come up here to collect the tax in kind. One of 'em found her hidin' place one day, an' was jest a-goin' to confiscate the meat when, with the sperrit of a woman, that's in her as big as a house, she drew a bead on him an' shot him. He was carried down the mounting by his men, an' p'r'aps he's done got well. I don't know an' I keers less. Anyhow, we's done got a few sides o' bacon an' a big bag o' meal an' a bushel o' salt. Ef you choose to take one o' them sides o' bacon, an' a little meal an' salt, an' give me one o' your pistols, I'm quite agreeable. The gun mout come in handy when I git a little still a-goin', down there in the holler."

"I'll do better than that," answered Duncan. "I'll give you a pair of the pistols, as I said."

"Hold on! Go a leetle slow, Mister, an' don't forgit nothin'. You preposed to gimme the p'ar o' pistols fer the bacon an' meal an' salt, *an'* fer yer dinner an' hoss feed. I've done tole you as how Si Watkins don't never take no pay fer a dinner an' a hoss feed. So you can't offer me the p'ar o' pistols 'thout offerin' to pay fer yer entertainment of man an' beast, an' I won't have that, I tell you."

"Very well," answered Duncan; "I didn't mean that. I'll give you one of the pistols in payment for the supply of provisions. That will end the business part of the matter. Now, I'm going to do something else with the other pistol – the mate of that one."

With that he opened his pocket knife and scratched on the silver mounting of the pistol's butt the legend: "To Si Watkins, in memory of a visit; from Guilford Duncan, Cairo, Illinois."

Then handing the inscribed weapon to his host he said:

"I have a right to make you a little present, purely in the way of friendship, and not as 'pay' for anything at all. I want to give you this pistol, and I want you to keep it. I don't know where I am going to live and work in the West, and I don't know why I wrote 'Cairo, Illinois' as my address. It simply came to me to do it. Perhaps it's a good omen. Anyhow, I shall go to Cairo, and if I leave there I'll arrange to have my letters forwarded to me, wherever I may be. So if you're in trouble at any time you can write to me at Cairo. I am as poor as you are now – yes, poorer. But I don't mean to stay poor. If you're in trouble at any time, I'll do my best to see you through, just as you have seen me through this time."

### III

## The New Birth of Manhood

Half an hour later the young man resumed his journey westward, passing down the farther slopes of the mountain.

"Wonder why I wrote 'Cairo' as my address," he thought, as his trusty horse carefully picked his way among the rocks and down the steeps. "I hadn't thought of Cairo before as even a possible destination. I know nobody there. I know absolutely nothing about the town, or the opportunities it may offer. I'm not superstitious, I think, but somehow this thing impresses me, and to Cairo I shall go – if only to receive Si Watkins's letter when it comes," he added with a smile.

Then he began a more practical train of thought.

"I've food enough now," he reflected, "to last me scantily for a few days. During that time I must make my way as far as I can toward the Ohio River at Pittsburg or Wheeling or Parkersburg. When I reach the River I must have money enough to pay steamboat fare to Cairo. There is no money in these parts, but West Virginia is practically a Northern State, and there are greenbacks there. I'll sell my remaining pistols there. A little later I'll sell my horse, my saddle, and my bridle. The horse is a good one, and so is the saddle. Surely I ought to get enough for them to pay my way to Cairo."

Then came another and a questioning thought:

"And when I get to Cairo? What then? I've a good university education, but I doubt that there is a ready market for education in any bustling Mississippi River town, just now. I'm a graduate in law, but Heaven knows I know very little about the profession aside from the broad underlying principles. Besides, I shall have no money with which to open an office, and who is going to employ a wandering and utterly destitute stranger to take charge of his legal business?"

For the moment discouragement dominated the young man's mind. But presently there came to him a reflection that gave new birth to his courage.

"I'm six feet high," he thought, "and broad in proportion. I'm in perfect physical health. I have muscles that nothing has ever yet tired. Between the wilderness and Appomattox I have had an extensive experience in shoveling earth and other hard work. I'm in exceedingly good training – a trifle underfed, perhaps, but at any rate I carry not one ounce of superfluous fat on my person. I am perfectly equipped for the hardest kind of physical work and in a busy western town there is sure to be work enough of that kind for a strong and willing man to do. I can at the very least earn enough as a laborer to feed me better than I've been fed for the four years of war."

Curiously enough, this prospect of work as a day laborer greatly cheered the young man. Instead of depressing his spirits, it for the first time lifted from his soul that incubus of melancholy with which every Confederate soldier of his class was at first oppressed. Ever since Grant had refused in the Wilderness – a year before – to retire beyond the river after receiving Lee's tremendous blows, Guilford Duncan and all Confederates of like intelligence had foreseen the end and had recognized its coming as inevitable. Nevertheless, when it came in fact, when the army of Northern Virginia surrendered, and when the Confederacy ceased to be, the event was scarcely less shocking and depressing to their minds than if it had been an unforeseen and unexpected one.

The melancholy that instantly took possession of such minds amounted to scarcely less than insanity, and for a prolonged period it paralyzed energy and made worse the ruin that war had wrought in the South.

Fortunately Guilford Duncan, thrown at once and absolutely upon his own resources, thus quickly escaped from the overshadowing cloud.



And yet his case seemed worse than that of most of his comrades. They, at least, had homes of some sort to go to; he had none. There was for them, debt burdened as their plantations were, at least a hope that some way out might ultimately be found. For him there was no inch of ground upon which he might rest even a hope.

Born of an old family he had been bred and educated as one to whom abundance was to come by inheritance, a man destined from birth to become in time the master of a great patrimonial estate.

But that estate was honeycombed with hereditary debt, the result of generations of lavish living, wasteful methods of agriculture, and over-generous hospitality. About the time when war came there came also a crisis in the affairs of Guilford Duncan's father. Long before the war ended the elder man had surrendered everything he had in the world to his creditors. He had then enlisted in the army, though he was more than sixty years old. He had been killed in the trenches before Petersburg, leaving his only son, Guilford, not only without a patrimony and without a home, but also without any family connection closer than some distant half-theoretical cousin-ships. The young man's mother had gently passed from earth so long ago that he only dimly remembered the sweet nobility of her character, and he had never had either brother or sister.

He was thus absolutely alone in the world, and he was penniless, too, as he rode down the mountain steeps. But the impulse of work had come to him, and he joyfully welcomed it as something vastly better and worthier of his strong young manhood than any brooding over misfortune could be, or any leading of the old aristocratic, half-idle planter life, if that had been possible.

In connection with this thought came another. He had recently read Owen Meredith's "Lucille," and as he journeyed he recalled the case there described of the French nobleman who for a time wasted his life and neglected his splendid opportunities in brooding over the downfall of the Bourbon dynasty, and in an obstinate refusal to reconcile himself to the new order of things. Duncan remembered how, after a while, when the new France became involved in the Crimean war, the Frenchman saw a clearer light; how he learned to feel that, under one regime or another, it was still France that he loved, and to France that his best service was due.

"That," thought Guilford Duncan, "was a new birth of patriotism. Why should not a similar new birth come to those of us who have fought in the Confederate Army? After all, the restored Union will be the only representative left of those principles for which we have so manfully battled during the last four years – the principles of liberty and equal rights and local self-government. We Confederates believe, and will always believe, that our cause was just and right, that it represented the fundamentals of that American system which our forefathers sealed and cemented with their blood. But our effort has failed. The Confederacy is eternally dead. The Union survives. What choice is left to us who followed Lee, except to reconcile ourselves with our new environment and help with all our might to preserve and perpetuate within the Union and by means of it, all of liberty and self-government, and human rights, that we have tried to maintain by the establishment of the Confederacy? We must either join heart and soul in that work, or we must idly sulk, living in the dead past and leaving it to our adversaries to do, without our help, the great good that, if we do not sulk, we can so mightily help in doing."

He paused in his thinking long enough to let his emotions have their word of protest against a reconciliation which sentiment resented as a surrender of principle.

Then, with a resolute determination that was final, he ended the debate in his own mind between futilely reactionary sentiment and hopeful, constructive, common sense.

"I for one, shall live in the future and not in the past. I shall make the best and not the worst of things as they are. I have put the war and all its issues completely behind me. For half a century to come the men on either side will organize themselves, I suppose, into societies whose purpose will be to cherish and perpetuate the memory of the war, and to make it a source of antagonism and bitterness. Their work will hinder progress. I will have nothing to do with it. I am no longer

a Confederate soldier. I am an American citizen. I shall endeavor to do my duty as such, wholly uninfluenced and unbiased by what has gone before.

"Surely there can be no abandonment of truth or justice or principle in that! It is the obvious dictate of common sense and patriotism. During the war I freely offered my life to our cause. The cause is dead, but I live. I have youth and strength. I have brains, I think, and I have education. These I shall devote to such work as I can find to do, such help as I can render in that upbuilding of my native land which must be the work of all Americans during the next decade or longer!

"Good-bye, Confederacy! Good-bye, Army! Good-bye, Lost Cause! I am young. I must 'look forward and not backward – up and not down.' Henceforth I shall live and breathe and act for the future, not for the past! Repining is about the most senseless and profitless occupation that the human mind can conceive."

At that moment the young man's horse encountered a huge boulder that had rolled down from the mountain side, completely blockading the path. With the spirit and the training that war service had given him, the animal stopped not nor stayed. He approached the obstacle with a leap or two, and then, with mighty effort, vaulted over it.

"Good for you, Bob!" cried the young man. "That's the way to meet obstacles, and that's the way I am resolved to meet them."

But the poor horse did not respond. He hobbled on three legs for a space. His master, dismounting, found that he had torn loose a tendon of one leg in the leap.

There was no choice but to drive a bullet into the poor beast's brain by way of putting him out of his agony.

Thus was Guilford Duncan left upon the mountain side, more desolate and helpless than before, with no possessions in all the world except a pair of pistols, a saddle, a bridle, a side of bacon, a peck of corn meal, and a few ounces of salt.

The Valley lay before him in all its barrenness. Beyond that lay hundreds of miles of Allegheny mountains and the region farther on.

All this expanse he must traverse on foot before arriving at that great river highway, by means of which he hoped to reach his destination, a thousand miles and more farther still to the West. But the new manhood had been born in Guilford Duncan's soul, and he was no more appalled by the difficult problem that he must now face than he had been by the fire of the enemy when battle was on. "Hard work," he reflected, "is the daily duty of the soldier of peace, just as hard fighting as that of the warrior."

Strapping his saddle and bridle on his back he took his bacon and his salt bag in one hand and his bag of meal in the other. Thus heavily burdened he set out on foot down the mountain.

"At any rate my load will grow lighter," he reflected, "every time I eat, and I'll sell the saddle and bridle at the first opportunity. I'll make the Ohio River in spite of all."

## IV

### A Private in the Army of Work

It was a truly terrible tramp that the young man had before him, but he did not shrink. So long as his provisions lasted he pushed forward, stopping only in the woodlands or by the wayside for sleep and for eating. By the time that his provisions were exhausted he had passed the Valley and had crossed the crest of the Alleghenies.

He was now in a country that had not been wasted by war, a country in which men of every class seemed to be reasonably prosperous and hard at work.

There, by way of replenishing his commissariat, he sold the saddle he was carrying on his back, and thus lightened his load.

Fortunately it was a specially good saddle, richly mounted with silver, and otherwise decorated to please the fancy of the dandy Federal officer from whose dead horse Duncan had captured it after its owner had been left stark upon the field in the Wilderness. It brought him now a good price in money, and to this the purchaser generously added a little store of provisions, including, for immediate use, some fresh meat – the first that had passed Duncan's lips for more months past than he could count upon the fingers of one hand.

A little later the young man sold his pistols, but as he pushed onward toward the Ohio River he found that both traveling and living in a prosperous country were far more expensive than traveling and living in war-desolated and still moneyless Virginia.

His little store of funds leaked out of his pockets so fast that, economize as he might, he found it necessary to ask for work here and there on his journey. It was spring time, and the farmers were glad enough to employ him for a day or two each. The wages were meagre enough, but Duncan accepted them gladly, the more so because the farmers in every case gave him board besides. Now and then he secured odd jobs as an assistant to mechanics. In one case he stoked the furnaces of a coal mine for a week.

But he did not remain long in any employment. As soon as he had a trifle of money or a little stock of provisions to the good, he moved onward toward the river.

His one dominating and ever-growing purpose was to reach Cairo. What fortune might await him there he knew not at all, but since he had scratched that address on the butt of a pistol, the desire to reach Cairo had daily and hourly grown upon him until it was now almost a passion. The name "Cairo" in his mind had become a synonym for "Opportunity."

It was about the middle of May when the toilsome foot journey ended at Wheeling. There Duncan, still wearing his tattered uniform, made diligent inquiry as to steamboats going down the river. He learned that one of the great coal-towing steamers from Pittsburg was expected within a few hours, pushing acres of coal-laden barges before her, and he was encouraged by the information, volunteered on every hand, that the work of "firing up" under the boilers of these coal-towing boats was so severe that a goodly number of the stokers always abandoned their employment in disgust of it, and deserted the boat if she made a landing at Wheeling, as this approaching one must do for the reason that a number of coal-laden barges had been left there for her to take in tow.

It was Guilford Duncan's hope to secure a place on her as a stoker or coal passer, to take the place of some one of the deserters. This might enable him, he thought, to earn a little money on the way down the river, instead of depleting his slenderly stocked purse by paying steamboat fare.

With such prospect in mind he ventured to go into the town and purchase a pair of boots and a suit of clothes fit for wear when he should reach Cairo. His worn-out uniform would answer all his purposes while serving as a stoker.

When the steamboat, with her vast fleet of barges, made a landing, Guilford Duncan was the first man to leap aboard in search of work. Unfortunately for him there were few or no deserters from in front of the furnaces on this trip. He could not secure employment as a stoker earning wages, but after some persuasion the steamer's captain agreed to let him "work his passage" to Cairo. That is to say, he was to pay no fare, receive no wages, and do double work in return for his passage down the river and for the coarse and unsavory food necessary for the maintenance of his strength.

"All this is a valuable part of my education," he reflected. "I am learning the important lesson that in work as in warfare the man counts for nothing – the service that can be got out of him is the only thing considered by those in command. I must remember all that, if ever I am in a position to make a bargain for the sale of my services."

It was in this spirit that the young ex-Captain entered upon his new career in the army of those that work. He was beginning at the bottom in the new service, just as he had done in the old. "I set out as a private in the army," he said to himself. "It was only when I had learned enough to fit me for the command of others that I was placed in authority. Very well, I'm beginning as a private again. I must learn all that I can, for I mean to command in that army, too, some day."

## V

### The Beginning of a Career

It was a little after sunset on Decoration Day – May 30, 1865 – when young Duncan went ashore from the tow boat at Cairo. The town was ablaze with fireworks, as he made his way up the slope of the levee, through a narrow passage way that ran between two mountainous piles of cotton bales. At other points there were equally great piles of corn and oats in sacks, pork in barrels, hams and bacon in boxes, and finer goods of every kind in bales and packing cases. For Cairo was just at that time the busiest *entrepôt* in all the Mississippi Valley.

The town was small, but its business was larger than that of many great cities. The little city lay at the point where the Ohio River runs into the Mississippi. From up and down the Mississippi, from the Ohio, from the Tennessee and the Cumberland, and even from far up the Missouri, great fleets of steamboats were landing at Cairo every day to load and unload cargoes representing a wealth as great as that of the Indies. A double-headed railroad from the North, carrying the produce of half a dozen States, and connecting by other roads with all the great cities of the land, made its terminus at Cairo. Two railroads from the South – traversing five States – ended their lines at Columbus, a little farther down the river, and were connected with the northern lines by steamboats from Cairo.

Cairo was the meeting place of commerce between the North and the South. Out of the upper rivers came light-draught steamers. Plying the river below were steamers of far different construction by reason of the easier conditions of navigation there. At Cairo every steamboat – whether from North or South – unloaded its freight for reshipment up or down the river, as the case might be, upon steamboats of a different type, or by rail. And all the freight brought North or South by rail must also be transferred at Cairo, either to river steamers or to railroad cars.

The South was still thronged with Northern troops, numbering hundreds of thousands, who must be fed and clothed, and otherwise supplied, and so the government's own traffic through the town was in itself a trade of vast proportions. But that was the smallest part of the matter. Now that the war was at an end, the South was setting to work to rebuild itself. From the Cumberland and the Tennessee rivers, from the lower Mississippi, from the Arkansas, the Yazoo, the Red River, the White, the St. Francis, and all the rest of the water-ways of the South, energetic men, of broken fortune, were hurrying to market all the cotton that they had managed to grow and to save during the war, in order that they might get money with which to buy the supplies needed for the cultivation of new crops.

Pretty nearly all this cotton came to Cairo, either for sale to eager buyers there, or for shipment to the East and a market.

In return the planters and the southern merchants through whom they did business were clamorous for such goods as they needed. Grain, hay, pork, bacon, agricultural implements, seed potatoes, lime, plaster, lumber, and everything else necessary to the rebuilding of southern homes and industries, were pouring into Cairo and out again by train loads and steamboat cargoes, night and day.

Even that was not all. For four years no woman in the South had possessed a new gown, or new handkerchiefs, or a new toothbrush, or a new set of window curtains, or a new comb, or new linen for her beds, or new shoes of other than plantation make, or a new ribbon or bit of lace, or anything else new. Now that the northern market was open for the sale of cotton the country merchants of the South were besieged for all these and a hundred other things, and their orders for goods from the North added mightily to the freight piles on the levee at Cairo.

As Guilford Duncan emerged from the alley-way between the cotton bales and reached the street at top of the levee, a still burning fragment of the fireworks fell upon a bale of which the bagging was badly torn, exposing the lint cotton in a way very tempting to fire. With the instinct of the soldier he instantly climbed to the top of the pile, tore away the burning bunches of lint cotton, and threw them to the ground, thus preventing further harm.

As he climbed down again a man confronted him.

"Are you a watchman?" asked the man.

"No, I'm only a man in search of work."

"Why did you do that, then?" queried the stranger, pointing to the still burning cotton scattered on the ground.

"On general principles, I suppose," answered Duncan. "There would have been a terrible fire if I hadn't."

"What's your name?"

"Guilford Duncan."

"Want work?"

"Yes."

"What sort?"

"Any sort – for good wages." That last phrase was the result of his stoker experience.

"Well, do you want to watch this cotton to-night and see that no harm comes to it, either from fire, or – what's worse – the cotton thieves that go down the alleys, pulling out all the lint they can from the torn bales?"

"Yes, if I can have fair wages."

"Will three dollars for the night be fair wages?"

"Yes – ample. How far does your freight extend up and down the levee?"

"It's pretty nearly all mine, but I have other watchmen on other parts of it. This is a new cargo. Your beat will extend – " and he gave the young man his boundaries.

"You'll be off duty at sunrise. Come to me at seven o'clock for your pay. I'm Captain Will Hallam. Anybody in Cairo will tell you where my office is. Good-night."

This was an excellent beginning, Duncan thought. Three dollars was more money than he had carried in his pocket at any time since he had bought his suit of clothes at Wheeling. Better still, the promptitude with which employment had thus come to him was encouraging, although the employment was but for a night. And when he reflected that he had won favor by doing what seemed to him an act of ordinary duty, he was disposed to regard the circumstance as another lesson in the new service of work.

The night passed without event of consequence. There were two or three little fires born of the holiday celebration, but Guilford Duncan managed to suppress them without difficulty. Later in the night the swarm of cotton thieves – mainly boys and girls – invaded the levee, with bags conveniently slung over their shoulders. As there were practically no policemen in the town, and as his beat was a large one, young Duncan for a time had difficulty in dealing with these marauders. But after he had arrested half a dozen of them only to find that there were no police officers to whom he could turn them over, he adopted a new plan. He secured a heavy stick from a bale of hay, and with that he clubbed every cotton thief he could catch. As a soldier it was his habit to adapt means to ends; so he hit hard at heads, and seized upon all the stolen goods. It was not long before word was passed among the marauders that there was "a devil of a fellow" in charge of that part of the levee, and for the rest of the night the pilferers confined their operations to spaces where a less alert watchfulness gave them better and safer opportunities.

Thus passed Guilford Duncan's first night as a common soldier in the great army of industry.

In the morning, at the hour appointed, he presented himself to Captain Will Hallam, and was taken into that person's private office for an interview.

## VI

### A Captain in the Army of Work

Captain Will Hallam Was a Man Of The Very Shrewdest sense, fairly – though not liberally – educated, whose life, from boyhood onward, had been devoted to the task of taking quick advantage of every opportunity that the great river traffic of the fifties had offered to men of enterprise and sound judgment.

Beginning as a barefoot boy – about 1850, or earlier, he never mentioned the date – he had "run the river" in all sorts of capacities until, when the war came, temporarily paralyzing the river trade, he had a comfortable little sum of money to the good.

Unable to foresee what the course and outcome of the war might be, he determined, as a measure of prudence, to indulge himself and his little hoard in a period of safe waiting. He converted all his possessions into gold and deposited the whole of it in a Canadian bank, where, while it earned no interest, it was at any rate perfectly safe.

Then he sought and secured a clerkship in the commissary department of the army, living upon the scant salary that the clerkship afforded, and meanwhile acquainting himself in minute detail with the food resources of every quarter of the country, the means and methods of transportation and handling, and everything else that could in any wise aid him in making himself a master in commerce.

Then one day in 1863, when he had satisfied himself that the fortunes of war were definitely turning and that in the end the Union cause was destined to triumph, he made a change.

He resigned his clerkship. He recalled his money from Canada, and considerably increased at least its nominal amount by converting the gold into greatly depreciated greenbacks.

With this capital he opened a commission and forwarding house at Cairo, together with a coal yard, a bank, five wharf boats, half a dozen tugs, an insurance office, a flour mill, and other things. He sent for his brothers to act as his clerks and presently to become his partners.

From the beginning he made money rapidly, and from the beginning he was eagerly on the lookout for opportunities, which in that time of rapid change were abundant. He quickly secured control of nearly all the commission and forwarding business that centered at Cairo. By underbidding the government itself he presently had contracts for all the vast government business of that character.

He was always ready to take up a collateral enterprise that promised results. When the Mississippi River was reopened to commerce by the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, Captain Will Hallam was the first to see and seize the opportunity. He bought everything he could lay his hands on in the way of steamboats and barges, and sent them all upon trading voyages – each under charge of a captain, but each directed by his own masterful mind – up and down the Mississippi, and up and down the Ohio, and up and down every navigable tributary of those great rivers.

This field was quickly made his own, so far as he cared to occupy it. If a rival attempted a competition that might hurt his enterprises, Captain Hallam quietly and quite without a ripple of anger in his voice, dictated some letters to his secretary. Then freight rates suddenly fell almost to the vanishing point, and after a disastrous trip or two, his adversary's steamboats became his own by purchase at low prices, and freight rates went up again. He bore no enmity to the men who thus antagonized him in business and whom he thus conquered. His attitude toward them was precisely that of a soldier toward his enemy. So long as they antagonized him he fought them mercilessly; as soon as they fell into his hands as wounded prisoners, he was ready and eager to do what he could for them.

Those of them who knew the river, and had shown capacity in business, were made steamboat captains in his service, or steamboat clerks, or wharf-boat managers, or agents, or something else – all at fair salaries.

It was Captain Will Hallam's practice to make partners of all men who might render him service in that capacity. Thus when he saw how great a business there must be at Cairo in supplying Pittsburg steam coal to the government fleets on the Mississippi, and to the thousands of other steamboats trafficking in those waters, he went at once to Pittsburg and two days later he had made a certain Captain Red his partner in the control of that vastly rich trade.

Captain Red was the largest owner of the Pittsburg mines, and the pioneer in the business of carrying coal-laden barges in acres and scores of acres down the river, pushing them with stern-wheel steamers of large power, but still of a power insufficient for the accomplishment of the best results.

Captain Red's fleet was unable to control the trade. Captain Hallam pointed out to him the desirability of making it adequate and dominant. Within two days the two had formed a partnership which included a number of New York bankers and investors as unknown and silent stockholders in the enterprise, and an abundant capital was provided. An order was given for the hurried building of the Ajax, the Hector, the Agamemnon, the Hercules, and half a dozen other stern-wheel steamers of power so great that they could not carry the coal needed for their own furnaces, but must tow it in barges alongside.

These powerful steamers were to push vast fleets of coal-laden barges down the river all the way from Pittsburg on the east to St. Louis on the west, and New Orleans on the south. They were to supply, through Hallam's agents, every town along the river and every steamboat that trafficked to any part of it. Hallam was master of it all. Cairo was to be the central distributing point, and if anybody along the river owned a coal mine in Kentucky or Indiana, or elsewhere, he was quickly made to understand that his best means of marketing his product at a profit was to sell it through the Hallam yards at Cairo.

In the meanwhile, as one region after another in the South was conquered by the Union arms, Captain Hallam, whose long river service had brought him into acquaintance with pretty nearly everybody worth knowing south of Cairo, established agents of his own at every point where there was cotton to be bought at extravagant prices, payable in gold, even while the war was going on. These agents bought the cotton, the planters agreeing to deliver it upon the banks of the rivers and leave it there at Hallam's risk. Then Captain Hallam's steamboats, big and little, would push their way up the little rivers, take the cotton on board, and carry it to Cairo.

At Cairo, while the war lasted, there were difficulties to be encountered. Military authority was supreme, and just when the influx of cotton was greatest, military authority arbitrarily decreed that no cotton should be shipped from Cairo to the North or East without a military permit. For a time this decree seriously embarrassed trade. The warehouses in Cairo were choked and glutted with cotton. New ones were built only to be choked in the same way. The levee was piled high with precious bales. Even vacant lots and unoccupied blocks in the low-lying town were rented and made storage places for cotton bales, piled into veritable mountains of wealth. For cotton was worth forty or fifty cents a pound, and even more, at that time, and scores of mills were idle for want of raw material, both in England and in New England, while not a bale could be shipped because the military authorities would issue no permits.

Will Hallam one day set himself down to think this thing out. "Why do the military authorities deny us shipping permits?" he asked himself. "The eastern buyers want the cotton, and we western holders of it want to sell it to them. There is absolutely no military or other good reason why the owner of cotton in one northern city should not be allowed to ship it to other northern cities where it is needed." Then he saw a light.



"The military people, or some of them, want a slice of the profit. That's what's the matter. I don't like to pay a bribe, but in a military time like this, and while Cairo is under martial law, I suppose I must submit to conditions as they are. I'm no theorist or moralist. I'm fairly honest, I think, but I'm a practical business man. Besides, I've a dozen partners interested in this cotton, and I owe it to them to get it off to a market. If I don't, most of them will go to the bowwows, financially. The military authorities have no right to forbid shipment and ruin men in this way, but they have the power and they are exercising it. What's that the Bible says about ploughing with the other fellow's heifer, and making friends with the Mammon of unrighteousness? I always play the game according to the rules, no matter whether I like the rules or not. I'll play this hand in that way."

Then turning to his secretary, he said:

"Call the main office cashier by telegraph and tell him to come to me at once, here at the house."

There were no telephones in that day, but Captain Will Hallam was accustomed to say that, living, as he did, in the nineteenth century, he made free use of nineteenth century conveniences in his business. He had laced the little city with telegraph wires, connecting his house not only with his office, and many warehouses, but with the houses of all the chief men in his employ, even to the head drayman. And he exacted of every one of his employees a reasonable facility in the use of the Morse telegraph.

Captain Hallam had many rules for the governance of his own conduct. Among them were these:

"Never be a fool – look at the practical side of things.

"Never let anything run away with you – keep cool.

"Never be in a hurry – make the other fellows do the hustling.

"Never let the men you work with know what you are doing – they might talk, or they might do a little business on their own account.

"Never be satisfied with anything as it is – there is always some way of bettering it.

"Never send good money after bad – it doesn't pay.

"Never waste energy in regretting a loss – there's a better use for energy.

"Never hesitate to pay for your education as you get it – use the telegraph freely, and keep in close communication with the men who are likely to know what you want to know.

"When you want a man to keep still, make it worth his while – but don't say anything to him about it. That opens the way to blackmail.

"Never take a drink – it unbalances the judgment.

"Never get angry – that's worse than taking a dozen drinks.

"Never do anything till you are ready to do it all over and clear through."

In obedience to the spirit of these rules, Captain Will Hallam, as soon as he had sent off his telegraphic messages, went out into his garden and hoed a while. Then he called John, his English gardener, and gave him some minute instructions respecting the care of certain plants. John resented the impertinence of course, but he obeyed the instructions, nevertheless. It was the fixed habit of men who worked for Captain Will Hallam to obey his commands.

Presently the cashier presented himself, with check book in hand.

"Draw a check for five thousand dollars," commanded Captain Hallam, "payable 'to the King of Holland or Bearer'. Mind, I say 'bearer,' *not* 'order.' Then draw another check for one hundred dollars, payable to yourself."

Not another word was said. No explanation of the gift to the cashier was offered or asked. The cashier understood. He drew the checks and his employer signed them. The smaller one he handed to his subordinate. The vastly larger one he thrust into his vest pocket, as he moved around a corner of the piazza to set his little girls swinging in a new contrivance which he had purchased for their use.

Presently he returned to his secretary and said:

"Telegraph Mr. Kingsbury to make out an application in proper form for a military permit to ship five thousand bales of cotton to New York. Tell him to have it ready for me at two o'clock at the main office."

Two hours later Captain Hallam found the application ready for him on his office desk. After looking it over he signed and carefully folded it after the fashion required for military documents, but as he did so he slipped into it the check for five thousand dollars, payable to the "King of Holland or Bearer."

No mention of the check was made in the document. If the proceeding should be resented at headquarters, the enclosure could be excused on the plea of accident.

Then the man of business bade his secretary envelop the package and send it by messenger to military headquarters.

It came back promptly with this endorsement on it:

"Application denied. The proposed shipment is larger than this office regards as proper *under existing circumstances*."

The last three words were heavily and suggestively underscored. Captain Hallam thought he understood. He was in the habit of understanding quickly. He called the cashier, handed him the check, first tearing it into four pieces, and bade him cancel the stub and draw a new check for ten thousand dollars, payable as before, to "the King of Holland *or Bearer*."

Then he endorsed the application with the sentence:

"As conditions have somewhat changed since this application was rejected, I venture to ask a reconsideration."

Half an hour later Captain Hallam was duly and officially notified that his application for permission to ship five thousand bales of cotton was granted.

The check – without endorsement – was cashed next day – the bank teller would never say by whom. But in the meanwhile Captain Hallam had said to his secretary:

"Telegraph the general freight agent at Chicago for freight cars, as fast as he can let me have them. Say I have five thousand bales of cotton awaiting shipment, with more to come as fast as I can get permits."

Then Captain Hallam mounted his horse and rode away for a "constitutional."

All this occurred a year or two before the time of Guilford Duncan's arrival in Cairo; but it was peculiarly characteristic of Captain Hallam's methods and the story of it is illustrative of his ideas.

## VII

### The "Sizing Up" of Guilford Duncan

Captain Will Hallam was quick to make up his mind with regard to a man. He was exceedingly accurate in his human judgments, too, and his confidence in them had been strengthened by experience in successfully acting upon them. As he phrased it, he "knew how to size a man up," and, as the employer of multitudes of men in all parts of the country and in all sorts of capacities, he had daily need of the skill he had acquired in that art. It was as much a part of his equipment for the conduct of his vast and varied enterprises as was his money capital itself.

When young Duncan presented himself in the private office after his night's vigil as a watchman, Captain Hallam asked him to sit. That was a recognition of his social status as something better than his employment of the night before might have suggested. Ordinarily a man employed as a levee watchman would not have been told to come to the private office at all. Nor would such a man have seen anybody higher than a junior clerk in collecting his wages.

But Captain Hallam had been impressed by this newcomer, and he wanted to talk with him. He broke at once into a catechism.

"Why did you do that little fire-extinguishing act last night?"

He asked the question precisely as he might have done if he had resented the saving of his wealth of cotton.

"Oh, it was simple enough. The fire meant damage, and I was there. So, of course, I put it out."

"But why? The cotton wasn't yours, and you hadn't been hired to watch it."

"No, of course not. But when a gentle – I mean when any decent man sees property afire he doesn't ask whose it is before putting out the blaze."

"You're a Virginian, I should say, from your voice – late of the rebel army. What's your rank?"

"None now. I've put the war completely behind me. I'm beginning life anew."

"Good! I wish everybody, north and south, would do the same. But fools won't, and men are mostly fools, you know. When did you get to Cairo?"

"About five minutes before you saw me putting out the fire. I came down the river on the big tow boat."

"Where's your baggage?"

"On my back. I have no other clothes. I'll buy some when I earn some money."

"Where have you been since the surrender?"

"Making my way West."

"How?"

"On foot to Wheeling. Then on the tow boat."

"What fare did they make you pay?"

"None. I worked my way as a stoker – fireman they call it out here."

"No wages? Just passage and grub?"

"That was all."

"What have you got on your wheel house?"

"I fear I don't understand."

"Oh, that's river slang. You know every side-wheel steamer has a statement of her destination painted on her wheel house. I meant to ask what are your plans?"

"To find work and do it."

"What kind of work?"

"Any kind that's honest."

"You are educated, I suppose?"

"Yes, in a way. I'm an A. M. and a graduate in law."

"Know anything about business?"

"No, but I shall learn."

"If you can, you mean?"

"Oh, I can. A capable man can learn anything if he really wants to."

"I don't know about that. But I'll gamble on the proposition that you can."

"Thank you."

"No thanks are needed. I wasn't complimenting. I was just expressing an opinion."

Scribbling a memorandum on a scrap of paper, Captain Hallam handed it to Duncan, saying:

"Give that to the cashier as you go out, and get your wages. Then you'd better get your breakfast. I recommend you, while you're poor, to eat at the little booths along the levee, where they sell very good sandwiches and coffee cheap. After breakfast, if you choose to come back here I'll try to find something for you to do. Oh, I forgot. You were up all night, so you'll want to sleep."

There was an interrogative note in the last sentence. Captain Hallam was "sizing up" his man, and he closely scrutinized Duncan's face as the answer came.

"Oh, I'm used to night duty. I'm ready for a day's work if you can give me one. As for breakfast, I've had it."

"Then you had money?"

"A very little; but I didn't spend any of it. I sawed and split a load of wood for the keeper of a booth, and he gave me some bread and ham and coffee for my work."

"Oh, that's the way you managed it. Very well. Come back here in two hours anyhow."

After the young man had passed out, Captain Hallam said to one of his partner brothers:

"That fellow is a good sort. He has sand in his gizzard. When he comes back set him at work at something or other – several things in succession in fact – and find out what he can do."

Such was Guilford Duncan's mustering into the new service of work.

## VIII On Duty

During the next four or five days Guilford Duncan was kept busy with various small employments, some of them out of doors and some of them in the office. During this time Captain Hallam did not again engage him in conversation, but Duncan knew that the man of business was closely observing his work. He was not slow to discover that he was giving satisfaction. He saw that with each day the work assigned him was of a kind that required a higher intelligence than that of the day before.

Every evening the cashier paid him his day's wages, thus reminding him that he was not a salaried employee of the house, but a man working for wages from day to day.

Out of his first wages he had purchased a change of very cheap underwear, a towel, and a cake of soap. Every morning about daylight he went to a secluded spot on the levee, for a scrub and a swim. Then he washed out his towel and placed it with his other small belongings, in a storage place he had discovered in a great lumber pile.

One morning when he entered the office Captain Hallam gave him several business letters to answer from memoranda scribbled upon them by clerks or others. He gave him also a memorandum in his own handwriting, saying:

"Cut that down if you can and make a telegram of it. I'll be back in half an hour or so. Have it ready for me."

The case was this: A huge steamboat lay at the levee, loaded almost to the water's edge with grain which Captain Hallam was more than anxious to hurry to New Orleans to meet a sudden temporary and very marked advance in that market. That morning the boat had been "tied up" – as the phrase went – that is to say, she had been legally attached for debt, at the suit of a firm in St. Louis. Until the attachment should be removed the boat must lie at Cairo, in charge of a sheriff's officer. Captain Hallam wished to secure her immediate release, and to that end he purposed sending the telegram.

When he returned to the office Duncan handed him for inspection and signature the letters he had written.

"Here is the telegram, also," he said, "but, if you will pardon the impertinence, I think you had better not send it – at least in the form you have given it."

"What's the matter?" quickly snapped Hallam.

"It binds you to more than I think you intend."

"Go on! Explain!"

"Why, I cannot help seeing that if you send this dispatch you will make yourself legally responsible, not only for the claim for which the boat is now attached, but also for every claim against her that may exist anywhere. There may be none such, or there may be many. In any case I do not think you intend to assume them all."

"Go on! The boat must be got away. What do you advise?"

"That you go on her bond for this claim – which seems to me so clearly illegal that I think you can never be held upon the bond – and –"

"Remind me, when this is over, that you are to come to my house to-night for consultation on that point. Now go on."

"Well, by going on her bond for this claim, instead of asking the creditors to release the boat on your promise as made in the telegram, you can secure her immediate release, making yourself liable, at worst, for no more than the six hundred dollars claimed."

"But if I do that, what is to prevent another tie-up at Memphis and another at Vicksburg and others wherever the boat may happen to land. She's in debt up to the top of her smokestacks, all along the river."

"As you own the cargo, and she can't carry another ton, why should you let her stop at all? I suppose the captain would do as you desire in that matter. You might request him to run through without any landings."

"Request be hanged. I'll tell him what to do and he'll do it. He knows where cargoes come from. Can you get the papers ready?"

"I can, sir."

"All right. Do it at once." Then turning to a shipping clerk he sent for the captain of the steamer, to whom he said:

"Get up steam at once. You are to leave in less than an hour. How much coal have you?"

The captain told him.

"Take two light barges of coal in tow, one on each side, and draw on them for fuel. When they're empty cast them loose with two men on each to land them. You can pick them up on your return trip. You are to steam to New Orleans without a landing anywhere. You understand?"

The captain understood. By this time the papers were ready and after half an hour spent in legal formalities the released steamboat cast loose from the wharf and backed out into the river.

Then Captain Hallam turned to Guilford Duncan and said:

"I've an idea that you'll do. If you like I'll put you at regular work at a monthly salary, and we'll see how we get on together."

"I should like that."

"Very well. Now, where are you boarding?"

"Nowhere. I get what I want to eat at the booths down along the levee."

"But where do you sleep?"

"Among the big lumber piles down there on Fourth street."

Captain Hallam looked at the young man for a moment with something like admiration in his eyes. Presently he said:

"You'll do. You've got grit and you'll 'make the riffle,' sure. But you must live more regularly, now that you are to have a salary. I know what it means to live as you've been doing. I used to do it myself. I could tell to a cent the nutritive value of a pegged pie or a sewed one, and at a single glance I could guess the probable proportions of the dog and cat in a sausage. That sort of thing's all right for a little while, but not for long, and as for the sleeping among lumber piles, it's risky. I used to sleep in an empty sugar hogshead by preference, but sleeping out of doors may give you rheumatism."

"I've been doing it for four years," answered Duncan, smiling, "and I still have the use of my limbs."

"Yes, of course. I didn't think of that. But you must live better now. There's a well-furnished room above the office. It was my brother's quarters before he got married, and it is very comfortable. You can take it for your own. Give Dutch John, the scrub boy, half a dollar a week to take care of it for you and that's all the rent you need pay. As for your meals, most young men in Cairo feed their faces at the hotel. But that's expensive and what the proprietor calls his 'kuzene' is distinctly bad. There's a lady, however, – Mrs. Deming, – who furnishes very good 'square meals,' I hear, over in Walnut street. You'd better try there, I think. She's what you would call a gentlewoman, but she needs all the money you'll pay her."

Duncan wondered a little what a 'square meal' might be, but he was getting somewhat used to the prevalence in the West of those figurative forms of expression which we call slang. So he took it for granted that "square meals" were for some reason preferable to meals of any other geometrical

form, and answered simply that he would look up Mrs. Deming's house after business hours should be over.

"Remember," said Captain Hallam as he passed out of the office, "you are to see me at my house to-night. Better come to supper – say at seven – and after supper we'll talk over that law point you mentioned, and other things."

Duncan wondered a little that Captain Hallam should give him so intimate an invitation when he knew so little of him. Everybody else in the office understood. Captain Will was planning to "size up his man" still further, in an evening's conversation.

## IX

### One Night's Work

As the weeks and months went on the results of Guilford Duncan's work completely justified the confident assertion he had made to Captain Hallam that *a capable man can learn anything if he really wants to*.

He rapidly familiarized himself with the technicalities, as well as with the methods and broad principles of business. He sat up till midnight for many nights in succession, in order to learn from the head bookkeeper the rather scant mysteries of bookkeeping. By observing the gaugers who measured coal barges to determine their contents, he quickly acquired skill in doing that.

It was so with everything. He was determined to master every art and mystery that in anywise pertained to business, whether the skill in question was or was not one that he was ever likely to need or to practice.

His diligence, his conscientiousness in work, his readiness of resource, his alert intelligence, and his sturdy integrity daily commended him more and more to the head of the firm, and not many months had passed before everyone in the office tacitly recognized the young Virginian as the confidential adviser and assistant of Captain Hallam himself, though no formal appointment of that kind had been made.

But no advance of salary came to the young man as a result. It was one of Captain Hallam's rules never to pay a man more for his services than he must, and never to advance a man's salary until the advance was asked for.

Captain Hallam was in no fibre of his being a miser, but he acted always upon those cold-blooded prudential principles that had brought him wealth. It was not money that this great captain of commerce worshiped, but success. Success was the one god of his idolatry. Outside of his business he was liberal in the extreme. Even in his business operations he never hesitated at lavish expenditure where such expenditure promised good results. But he regarded all unnecessary spending as waste, of the kind that imperils success.

In his cynical moments, indeed, he sometimes said that "if you have a valuable man in your employ, you must keep him poor; otherwise you'll lose him." But in so saying he perhaps did himself an injustice. He was apt to feign a heartless selfishness that he did not feel.

Little by little Guilford Duncan had learned all this as he had learned business methods. He had at first modestly proposed to himself nothing more in the way of achievement than to make himself a valuable subordinate – a private, or at most a corporal or a sergeant – in the ranks of the great army of work. But before many months had passed his modesty was compelled to yield somewhat to an increasingly clear understanding of conditions and possibilities. Somewhat to his own surprise he began to suspect himself of possessing capacities superior to those of the men about him, and even superior to those of many men who had risen to high place in commerce and finance.

As Captain Hallam came more and more to rely upon the sagacity and character of this his most trusted man, he more and more brought young Duncan into those confidential conferences with the leading men of affairs, which were frequently necessary in the planning and execution of important enterprises, or in the meeting of difficulties and obstacles. In that way Duncan was brought into personal contact with the recognized masters – big and little – with railroad presidents, financiers, bankers, capitalists, and other men whose positions were in a greater or less degree commanding.

At first he modestly held himself as nothing more than the tool and servitor of these great men. But presently he began to suspect that they were not very great men after all – to see that it



was usually he himself who devised and suggested the enterprises that these men undertook, and he who saved them from mistakes in the execution of those enterprises.

Guilford Duncan had never in his life kept a diary. He regarded that practice as a useless puerility and usually an indulgence in morbid self-communing and unwholesome self-consciousness. But it was his practice, sometimes, late at night, to set down upon paper such thoughts as had interested him during the day, for the sole sake of formulating them in his own mind. Often he would in this way discuss with himself questions concerning which he had not yet matured his opinion.

He found the practice conducive to clear thinking and sound judgment. It served for him the same purpose that the writing of intimate letters might have done if he had had any intimates to whom to write letters.

"I've been in conference this day," he wrote one night, "with half a dozen nabobs – not great nabobs, but second rate ones. Mr. M – was the biggest one. He's a railroad president, and he always talks loftily of his 'system' when he means the single railroad he presides over and its little branches. Then there was D – . He's a General Freight Agent, and he never forgets the fact or lets anybody else forget it. That's because he was a small shipping clerk until less than two years ago. I don't think much of his capacity. Yes, I do. He knows how to manage a big traffic fairly well, and he has had *nous* enough to climb out of his small clerkship into a position of responsibility. What I mean is that he has little education, no culture, and no intelligence outside of business. But I begin to see that except in its very highest places, business does not require anything better than good ordinary ability inspired by inordinate selfishness. Perhaps that is the reason that the novelists so rarely – I may say never – take a man of business for the hero of a romantic story.

"All this has put a new thought into my mind. Why should not I, Guilford Duncan, make myself a leader, a captain, or even a commanding general of affairs. I am far better educated than any of these men. They hold that education is a hindrance rather than a help in business, but in that they are mightily wrong, as I intend presently to show them. Other things being equal, a man of trained mind should certainly achieve better results, even in business, than a man of untrained mind. A man of trained mind, if he has natural capacity and energy, *can do anything that he chooses to do*. I must never forget that.

"But the man who would do things of any consequence in business ways must have money. The bank account is his tool chest.

"I suggested some combinations to-night to those nabobs, and they are going to carry them out. They would never have thought of the combinations but for my suggestion. But they can and will carry them out, with great credit and profit to themselves, because they have command of money. *I* could not even think of conducting such affairs, simply because I have no command of money.

"Very well, then. I shall proceed to get money, just as I should study to acquire skill in a profession, or just as I should read up the law pertaining to a matter with which I must deal.

"I shall not learn to love money. That would degrade my soul. I shall regard money always as a means – a mere tool with which to do such work as I can in this great undeveloped country.

"That also is something to be remembered. The era of development is just beginning. These men are nation builders, though they don't know it, or intend it, or care anything about that aspect of their activities. Their motives are the sordid impulses of greed and selfish ambition alone.

"At least that is true of all of them except Captain Hallam. He is a man apart. His attitude is a peculiar one. He does not care for wealth in itself and yet he scrambles for it as greedily and as hungrily as the rest of them. Sometimes I think he regards the whole thing as a game which he enjoys playing with superior skill, just as one might with whist or chess. He likes to win, not for the sake of the winnings, but for the sake of the winning.

"I must go to bed now. To-morrow I'll begin thinking out plans for getting money. One thing is sure. No man can get much money by working for any other man. The man who gets rich is he who hires other men to work for him for less than their work is worth. But it is only by working for another man that one can get the first little capital – the first rude but handy tool with which to achieve success. I'll go on working as a hired man till I get a little hoard together. After that – well, we shall see."

Duncan was greatly admired but little understood by his fellows in the service of the Hallam firm, or by the similar people who thronged the town. His fellows, in and out of the office, were commonplace young men, all looking to the main chance alone and pursuing it with only such honesty of conduct as business prudence required. They felt no further interest in their work than such as was necessary to enable them to retain their places and their salaries.

Therefore they did not understand Guilford Duncan. Neither could they. They regarded with amazement and almost with incredulity his manifestations of sensitive honor and of unselfish loyalty to duty. They thought of him as a sort of freak, or what we should nowadays call a crank.

Of course they could not fail to recognize his ability, but they thought him a good deal of a fool, nevertheless, for not taking selfish advantage of the opportunities that so frequently came to him. They could not understand why he should go out of his way, as he very often did, to render services to the firm which were in no way required or expected of him. Especially they could not understand why, when he had rendered such services in a way to attract Captain Hallam's pleased attention he didn't "strike for something better," as they phrased their thought.

In one especial case, their amazement over his neglect of an opportunity bred something like contempt of him in their minds. It was the practice of the Hallams to keep a fleet of heavily laden coal barges in a bend of the river above the town, bringing them down one by one to the coalyards at "The Point" below the city as they were needed. One day in the early winter, a coal gauger being off duty, Duncan volunteered to go up to the bend in his stead, and measure the coal in a great fleet of barges that had just arrived.

He found the barges unsafely bestowed, and suggested to the captain of the Hallam yard tug boat that he should tow them into a securer anchorage. As night was at hand the captain of the tug refused, saying that he would attend to the matter on the morrow.

That night the first storm of the winter broke upon the river, lashing it to fury, and threatening with destruction every species of craft that might venture away from moorings.

About midnight one of Duncan's bedroom windows was blown in, scattering glass and fragments of sash over his bed, and startling him out of sleep.

Instantly the thought of the exposed coal barges flashed into his mind. He knew that they were utterly unfit to ride out a storm, being nothing more than great oblong boxes, loaded nearly to their gunwales with coal. He remembered, too, the exposed position in which they had been left for the night.

Hastily drawing on his clothing he hurried to the landing place of the yard tug. He found no preparations making there for any attempt to save the barges and their enormously rich cargoes, or even to rescue the helpless men who had been left on board of them. The engineer of the tug, who always slept on board, was there, and so were the two deck hands and the fireman, but the fires were banked, and the captain had not responded to the duty call of the tempest.

As the immediate representative and chief lieutenant of Captain Hallam, Guilford Duncan was recognized as a man somewhat entitled to give orders. On this occasion he promptly assumed so much more of authority as did not strictly belong to him.

He instantly ordered the engineer to get up steam. He directed one of the two deck hands to go hurriedly to the tug captain's bedroom and order him to come to the tug at once.

As he rattled off his orders for putting cable coils aboard, placing all fenders in position, battening down the hatches, and doing all else that might render the tug fitter for the perilous service

that he intended to exact of her, his voice took on the old ring of battle, and his commands came quick, sharp, and penetrating from his set lips, like those of an officer placing guns in position for a desperate fight.

The captain, who was also sole pilot of the tug, so far obeyed the order sent to him as to come to the tug landing. But when he looked out upon the storm-lashed river, he positively refused to obey Duncan's order to go to the wheel.

"I'll never take the tug out in such a storm as this," he said doggedly.

"But think, man! There are twenty men or more up there on those coal barges, whose lives simply *must* be saved. And there is a hundred thousand dollars' worth of coal there that may go to the bottom any minute."

"I can't help that. I tell you the tug couldn't live a minute in such a storm."

"In other words," answered Duncan with measureless contempt in his tone, "you are a miserable coward, a white-livered wretch, whose life wouldn't be worth saving if it were in danger. Go back to your bed! Go to sleep! or *go to hell*, damn you, for the cowardly whelp that you are!"

Then turning to the engineer and the two deck hands, he asked hoarsely:

"Will you men stand to your duty while I go to the wheel?"

"We're with you while she floats, cap'n," said the engineer. "I always did hate a coward."

"Have you got steam enough?"

"Yes, a hundred and fifty pounds pressure to the square inch, and she'll need it all."

"All right. Cast her off," commanded Duncan as he stepped to his post in the pilot house.

He knew, of course, that he was taking terrible risks. Having no pilot's license he had no legal right to be at the wheel. Should disaster overtake the tug he would be personally liable for the insurance forfeited by his act in taking her out in contravention of the judgment of her captain and pilot. Worse still, should any life be lost in the adventure, Guilford Duncan would be held to answer for manslaughter.

Well-educated lawyer that he was, he knew all these facts. He perfectly understood the fearful responsibilities he was taking upon himself. Yet he faltered not nor failed. There was no moment's hesitation in his mind. There were lives in peril up there in the bend, and a vast property exposed to destruction. There was a chance that by taking these risks he might save both. All that is best in the soul-impulse of the soldier was his inspiration. He would do his duty – though that duty was in no wise his except as he had made it his – and let consequences look out for themselves.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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