

THE
ROYALIST KNIGHT:
A
Tale of Millom Castle

In the good old times men were perpetually at war with each other, and those days were famous days for making widows and orphans. One autumn night, Hugh Hodgshon, of Baystone Bank, had retired to bed, and had well-nigh got through his first sleep, when he was awakened by a poke from his wife. Hugh was a heavy sleeper, but at length, being thoroughly roused, he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes. "Why, man," said Dame Margaret, "what a sleeper thou art. I do believe if t'Loggan Beck were to run through t'house, it would not wake thee up; and there be someone banging at the door, making as much noise as the minute gun at Haverigg does when there's a wreck off the point." In another second, Hugh had his head out of the window. "Hallo," said a voice from below, "it is I, John Pool, of Millom, come to bid thee, with what aid thou can'st bring, to the Castle in the morning, for old Sir Ferdinando Huddlestone, with his son and others, are besieged in Pontefract Castle, in sore straits for want of ammunition and food. Our good lady droops sadly, and will not be comforted, as she says three sons have already been slain in the wars, and she fears she shall soon be a widow. But I must wish you good night, as I have other places to call at," and the sounds of the feet of John Pool's horse were heard, as he sped away on his errand. There was but little more sleep for Hugh that night. The few remaining hours before starting were spent in instructions to his wife about the management of affairs during his absence, orders to the boy as to the feeding of the cattle, and injunctions from Margaret to Hugh to be careful of his person, and not to rush into unnecessary dangers. Before dawn, Hugh set off for Millom Castle, attended by two stout servitors. They could see, by the flitting to and fro of lights, and the noise of men and horses, that something unusual was going forward, while yet at a considerable distance from the old fortified mansion. Arrived at the Castle, Hugh found some forty yeomen, assembled from all parts of the lordship – from Ulpha, Kirksanton, and anywhere, in fact, where stout hearts and willing arms could be found. After a hearty and hasty meal consisting of huge joints of meat and baskets of oatbread, backed up by flagons of ale, the party set forth, and, the tide being out, they crossed the sands to Kirkby, where they were met by Roger Kirkby, of Kirkby Old Hall, with several of his followers. It was agreed that Roger, being in some degree related to the Huddlestones by marriage, should take command of the troop. Travelling as quickly as the state of the roads would allow, and being too strong a force to fear interruption on the way – for it was understood that no large bodies of the enemy were posted nearer than Carlisle on the one hand and Lancaster on the other – they reached Milnthorpe safely the same night, and, feeling secure from any attack, got the benefit of a night's rest – a good preparation for the journey of the following day. By making a considerable detour round Lancaster, they managed, late in the evening, to reach Settle, then, as now, a place of some size, and where they hoped to be reinforced. The little hostelry was put into considerable confusion by the sudden arrival of from fifty to sixty horsemen, and the host was running about in a state of bewilderment as to how he should put sixty horses into a stable which was only built to hold twenty. After, however, extemporising a cowhouse, and borrowing of neighbours as stall here and a stall thee, the whole were housed, and the tired party retired, to take such refreshment, and rest, as

they could find in the hastily-cooked food, and various rooms of the inn. The landlord, having somewhat recovered from the excitement of having to provide for so large a party, had ensconced himself in his little sanctum, having invited Roger Kirkby, and two or three of the more favoured of the party, to enjoy the superior comforts of his room. We do not know whether the Green Dragon still exists at Settle, but at the time we write of the sign-board of the Green Dragon hung in all its pride, swinging backwards and forwards as the wind chanced to blow. People in the neighbourhood said the landlord of the inn and the sign-board were typical, that as the sign was swayed by the wind of heaven, so was the landlord moved in his party feeling, just as his interest and his pocket were likely to be benefited.

Master Roger Kirkby, knowing this fact well, had consulted Hugh Hodgshon, and another or two, as to whether it would not be necessary to keep a watch over him, but this individual had shown himself so desirous to make everyone comfortable, that at present it was agreed to let matters take their course.

The landlady, a buxom woman, with her sleeves turned up, bustled in and out; savoury smells from the kitchen, greeted the noses of the hungry guests. At last, supper appeared, to which all did ample justice. When the fragments of the feast were removed, the landlady came to apologise that the best room in her house was already occupied by a gentleman who had arrived some two hours before the coming of the Cumberland party, but if Master Roger Kirkby and Hugh Hodgshon did not object to an inner room, where they would find a comfortable bed, she had no doubt but they would get a good night's rest, as to the rest of the party, she would do the best she could for them.

Roger having listened to the Dame's long-winded harangue with some impatience, expressed his perfect satisfaction with the arrangement, and his desire to retire forthwith; upon which the dame lighted one of those long candles made from a rush dipped in fat, placed it in a candlestick, resembling a gigantic pair of tweezers, and proceeded to lead the way. Having arrived at the door, which she opened, and pointed to a second, which appeared on the opposite side of the room, as the one leading to their chamber, she shut the door and bade them good night.

Now Hugh Hodgshon was an inquisitive man, there never was a Hodgshon who was not; and he could not help, as he passed through the room, taking a peep at the bed, which was evidently occupied; a fact which was patent also by the heavy breathing of the sleeper; and what a look it was, Hugh often used to declare afterwards to his wife, that he never felt so near fainting in his life as he did then.

There, with this long iron grey hair on the pillow, lay old Sir Ferdinando Huddlestone, his cheeks hollow and pinched, and eyes sunk deep in their sockets, one arm stretched outside the bed, with a thin hand clasped, as if in pain. For the moment Hugh was spellbound, and when he had recovered sufficiently to follow after Master Roger, he found that gentlemen already more than half undressed. The pair were, however, quickly back by the knight's bedside, and as sleep was out of the question, it was agreed not to waken him up, but to watch till he should rouse of himself. It was a weary watch; men are at all times bad nurses, and after a long and fatiguing day's march, no wonder that Roger and Hugh found themselves often on the point of dropping asleep. During one of these little nods, Hugh was suddenly started by the words, "Is it a dream Roger? Hugh, where am I? See to the guns! But Roger, where am I?" and by this time the old knight was wide awake. "With

friends Sir Ferdinando!" said Roger; "And with friends who are quite as much surprised to see you, as you can be to see them. How in the world did you get here? We were on the way to Pontefract, hoping by some chance to relieve you!"

"Well," said the knight, "the meeting is to me as welcome as it is unexpected, and I may as well tell you in as few words as possible how I got here. You know we had been shut up in Pontefract castle for about three months, the garrison was composed chiefly of Nottinghamshire men, and General Lambert, who commanded the besiegers, was so vigilant, that it was next to impossible to get in provisions of any kind. We had been on short commons for a month, and the latter half of that month on almost no commons at all, the horses were ready to eat each other's tail off, every useless animal had been killed so that provender might be spared; the men had begun to grumble, as Englishmen always do when ill-fed, and moreover the ammunition began to run out, so that altogether we were in a desperate condition. At last, the governor called a council, and it was determined to send Lambert a message that we would give up the castle, provided that our lives and our arms were respected. Old Andrew Fairfield was instructed to go forthwith, and negotiate with the enemy." "My word, but you chose a poor ambassador, Sir Knight!" broke in Roger Kirkby. "'Tis true," continued Sir Ferdinando. "Old Andrew is no great diplomatist, but you see he was the fattest amongst us. What with starving, and fighting, and serving the walls, we were well-nigh reduced to skeletons, and being fearful lest our lean bodies should let Lambert know how matters stood, we were fain to put in Master Andrew for appearance sake. Placing him on the best looking steed we could find, Andrew sought an interview with Lambert, and returned with the answer that had the matter rested with him alone, he would have gladly come to our terms, for he knew us to be brave men, and he respected us, but we had amongst us six gentlemen whose lives were forfeited to the government, and who were condemned to die. As to the rest, they might go, where and how they liked, with arms and ammunition, bag and baggage. He further said that he would give us six days to consider of it, and if during that time the six gentlemen whose names he mentioned, could escape by any honourable means, then the rest should be at liberty to depart. During the first three days we made various feints and sallies, and three of the six escaped. On the evening of the third day we held a council, and Sir Hugh Cartwright proposed that we should make no more sorties, as it distressed him to think that men whose lives were promised them, should lose them on his account; and he urged that there was an old Corridor now I ruins, and that we three whose lives were proscribed, should be walled up amongst the ruins, with a month's provisions, trusting to the castle being retaken, and afterwards the rest of the garrison should inform Lambert of the six gentlemen having escaped, and conform to the terms. We sat long, and there was great diversity of opinion, though all were anxious that no more lives should be lost. It was at last agreed that one more sally should be made, and if all had not escaped, that Sir High Cartwright's plan should be tried. "Now Roger," said the Knight, "I had the greatest horror of being walled up, it seemed to me just like being buried alive, and I determined to make my escape or perish in the attempt. Early the following morning, in the fog, we rode out to make our last effort. It was in vain to endeavour to surprise the enemy; we could hear their bugle notes long before we reached their lines. I can tell you but little of the fight. We made a dash, and, thanks to finding a weak place in their ranks, I made my escape. Whether Sir Hugh Cartwright and Sir John Digby were equally fortunate, I know not."

"And how about Master John?" said Roger Kirkby. "My son, you mean?" said the Knight. "Why, as his life was not in danger, he was left with the garrison, and doubtless, in a few days' time,

he will find his way home again. And now, Roger, the sooner we are in the saddle again the better I shall like it, for I shall not feel secure till I am on the other side of the Duddon.”

As speedily as possible the party set out on their return homewards, with joyful hearts, glad enough to have achieved their object so easily.

But we must return to the landlord. No sooner had Roger and Hugh retired for the night, than, all being quiet, he stole gently out of the house, and, saddling his horse, rode some miles to a crenel of his own stamp, to consult as to whether something could not be made out of the capture of Sir Ferdinando, for the landlord knew perfectly well who he had got in his house, but, at the same time, had not the slightest idea that the party who had turned up so unexpectedly were in any way connected with the welfare of that honourable gentleman. His intention was to have returned to his home before anybody was astir, but, unfortunately for him – whether the discussion had been too long, or whether he had indulged in an extra glass, and so time had passed away quicker than he had expected – he had not reached the inn, when the party started on their journey. This had not escaped the quick eye of Roger Kirkby, and scarcely had the cavalcade proceeded two miles on its way, than, turning sharply round a corner, who should they meet, face to face, but the landlord! The meeting was so unexpected, that mine host had not even time to attempt to escape, and at the same time his hands dropped so helplessly by his side, and his face had such an unmistakeably guilty look, that no one could for a moment doubt his having been on some knavish errand. Hugh Hodgshon’s hand was on his throat in an instant: several voices called out, “Hang him!” “Get a rope!” and there were not wanting those who would have done it too, for Cumberland men are apt to be hasty when their blood is up. The Knight, however, desired that the rascal should be taken along with them, and he was accordingly made to ride between two of the Tysons of Dunnerdale, two young giants, some six feet two inches in height, and broad in proportion. No further adventures took place, and, after some hard riding, the party halted for the night at Ingleton, being careful, as before, to give Lancaster a wide berth, and proceeded the following day, by devious roads and byeways, to Milnthorpe, where, it will be remembered, they spent their first night after leaving Millom.

The prospect of so soon reaching home seemed to put everyone in the best possible spirits. Some of the youngest of the party seemed to take particular pleasure in telling the miserable innkeeper that he had only one more day to live, for they had not the slightest doubt but that as soon as he reached Millom shore, there was a certain stone in a certain lane, called “The Hanging Stone,” with which he would be made intimately acquainted, and they moreover informed him that no one who got on to that stone was ever known to come off again alive. This had such an effect on the wretched man, that it seemed doubtful whether he would live to reach the dreadful stone.

The last morning, the bugles sounded cheerfully to horse, and the troop was in marching order, the prisoner, placed between the two Tysons, looking woe-begone indeed, his countenance contrasting sadly with the honest faces of the Cumberland yeomen, now so near their homes. “Before we start,” said Sir Ferdinando, “bring forth the prisoner,” and, more dead than alive, the unhappy man was pushed to the front. “Now,” said the Knight, “tell us the truth, and the full truth, for, by my faith, if thou dost so much as add one more lie to the already black catalogue that has gone before, thou shalt hang on the nearest tree that is strong enough to bear thee!” And then the abject wretch told everything – told how he had arranged with his friend to send forward to

Lancaster, and appraise Colonel Bartholomew Briggs, of Calgath Hall, at that time stationed at the county town with his troop, and known to be a stern Puritan; and how they were to escort the Knight on his way, and led him by a certain route, where Master Bat Briggs was to be in waiting; and, further, how all this was to be done in consideration of a certain number of pounds sterling, which were to be divided between the scoundrel pair. There was an universal shout that the knave's life was forfeit, but the Knight, motioning silence with one hand, and pointing in the opposite direction to that in which they were going with the other, simply said, as if he disdained to waste words on such an object, "Begone!" As the man skulked off, he was shouted after by Hugh Hodgshon, who, in a stentorian voice, said he feared it was impossible to make him a better man, but he trusted it might, at all events, make him a wiser one. The word of command was then given. At Ireleth, the Kirkby men took their leave, and before the shadows of evening fell on the dark sides of Black Comb the remainder of the party had been welcomed at Millom Castle.

The meeting of Sir Ferdinando and his wife was a joyful one, and their mutual pleasure was enhanced by the belief that, ere long, their son would reach home. There is little more to relate. It is said that, for some time after, Sir Ferdinando kept a quick vessel at Borwick Harbour, and that he had also relays of horses stationed at different places towards the North; but as Cromwell began to feel secure in his position and power, the good Knight was never disturbed, and the means of escape were not required.

There is one thing more to add. Two of the six gentlemen were really walled up in Pontefract Castle, with provisions; the garrison then marched out and said the six had escaped. Lambert entered the castle, contented himself with dismantling the walls, and then retired. The immured gentlemen, after ten days, finding all was quiet, emerged from their hiding place, and escaped.

This tale, founded on fact, was written in 1870 by Thomas Postlethwaite.

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