

THE PORT OF MISSING MEN

By Meridith Nicholson

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CHAPTER VI

TOWARD THE WESTERN STARS.

GENEVA is a good point from which to plan flight to any part of the world, for there at the top of Europe the whole continental railway system is easily within your grasp, and you may make your choice of sailing ports. It is, to be sure, rather out of your way to seek a ship at Liverpool unless you expect to gain some particular advantage in doing so. Mr. John Armitage hurried thither in the most breathless haste to catch the King Edward, whereas he might have taken the Touraine at Cherbourg and saved himself a mad scamper, but his satisfaction in finding himself aboard the King Edward was supreme. He was and is, it may be said, a man who salutes the passing days right amiably, no matter how somber their colors.

Shirley Claiborne and Captain Richard Claiborne, her brother, were on deck watching the shipping in the Mersey as the big steamer swung into the channel.

"I hope," observed Dick, "that we have shaken off all your transatlantic suitors. That little Chauvenet died easier than I had expected. He never turned up after we left Florence, but I'm not wholly sure that we shan't find him at the dock in New York. And that mysterious Armitage, who spent so much railway fare following us about and who almost bought you a watch in Geneva, really disappoints me. His persistence had actually compelled my admiration. For a glass blower he was fairly decent, though, and better than a lot of these little toy men with imitation titles."

"Oh, my large brother, I have a confession to make," said Shirley. "Please don't indulge in great oaths or stamp a hole in this sturdy deck, but there are flowers in my stateroom."

"Probably from the Liverpool consul. He's been pestering father to help him get a transfer to a less gloomy hole."

"Then I shall intercede myself with the president when I get home. They are orchids—from London—but with Mr. Armitage's card. Wouldn't that excite you?"

"It makes me sick!" and Dick hung heavily on the rail and glared at a passing tug.

"They are beautiful orchids. I don't remember when orchids have happened to me before, Richard—in such quantities. Now, you really didn't disapprove of him so much, did you? This is probably goodby forever, but he wasn't so bad, and he may be an American, after all."

"A common adventurer! Such fellows are always turning up, like bad pennies or a one-eyed dog. If I should see him again!"

"Yes, Richard, if you should meet again!"

"I'd ask him to be good enough to stop following us about, and if he persisted I should muss him up."

"Yes; I'm sure you would protect me from his importunities at any hazard," mocked Shirley, turning and leaning against the rail so that she looked along the deck beyond her brother's stalwart shoulders.

"Don't be silly," observed Dick, whose eyes were upon a trim yacht that was steaming slowly beneath them.

"I shan't, but please don't be violent! Do not murder the poor man, Dickie, dear!"—and she took hold of his arm entreatingly—"for there he is—as tall and mysterious as ever—and me found guilty with a few of his orchids pinned to my jacket!"

"This is good fortune, indeed," said Armitage a moment later when they had shaken hands. "I finished my errand at Geneva unexpectedly, and here I am."

He smiled at the feebleness of his explanation and joined in their passing comment on the life of the harbor. He was not so dull but that he felt Dick Claiborne's resentment of his presence on board. He knew perfectly well that his acquaintance with the Claibornes was too slight to be severely strained, particularly where a fellow of Dick Claiborne's high spirit was concerned. He talked with them a few minutes longer, then took himself off, and they saw little of him the rest of the day.

Armitage did not share their distinction of a seat at the captain's table, and Dick found him late at night in the smoking saloon with pipe and book. Armitage nodded and asked him to sit down.

"You are a sailor as well as a soldier, captain. You are fortunate. I always sit up the first night to make sure the enemy doesn't lay hold of me in my sleep."

He tossed his book aside, had brandy and soda brought and offered Claiborne a cigar.

"This is not the most fortunate season for crossing. I am sure to fall tomorrow. My father and mother hate the sea particularly and have retired for three days. My sister is the only one of us who is perfectly immune."

Dick Claiborne was a good deal amused at finding himself sitting beside Armitage—enjoying, indeed, his fellow traveler's hospitality, but Armitage, he was forced to admit, bore all the marks of a gentleman. He had, to be sure, followed Shirley about, but even the young man's manner in this was hardly a matter at which he could

cavil. And there was something altogether likable in Armitage. His very composure was attractive to Claiborne, and the bold lines of his figure were not wasted on the young officer.

Armitage was thinking rapidly of something he had suddenly resolved to say to Captain Claiborne. He knew that the Claibornes were a family of distinction. The father was an American diplomat and lawyer of wide reputation. The family stood for the best of which America is capable, and they were homeward bound to the American capital, where their social position and the father's fame made them conspicuous.

Armitage put down his cigar and bent toward Claiborne, speaking with quiet directness.

"Captain Claiborne, I was introduced to you at Geneva by Mr. Singleton. You may have observed me several times previously at Venice, Rome, Florence, Paris, Berlin. I certainly saw you. I shall not deny that I intentionally followed you, nor"

—John Armitage smiled, then grew grave again—"can I make any adequate apology for doing so."

Claiborne looked at Armitage wondering. The man's attitude and tone were wholly serious and compelled respect. Claiborne nodded and threw away his cigar that he might give his whole attention to what Armitage might have to say.

"A man does not like to have his sister forming the acquaintance of persons who are not properly vouched for. Except for Singleton you know nothing of me, and Singleton knows very little of me indeed."

Claiborne nodded. He felt the color creeping into his cheeks consciously as Armitage touched upon this matter.

"I speak to you as I do because it is your right to know who and what I am, for I am not on the King Edward by accident, but by intention, and I am going to Washington because your sister lives there."

Claiborne smiled in spite of himself. "But, my dear sir, this is most extraordinary! I don't know that I care to hear any more. By listening I seem to be encouraging you to follow us. It's altogether too unusual. It's almost preposterous."

And Dick Claiborne frowned severely, but Armitage still met his eyes gravely.

"It's only decent for a man to give his references when it's natural for them to be required. I was educated at Trinity college, Toronto. I spent a year at the Harvard law school. And I am not a beggar utterly. I own a ranch in Montana that actually pays and a thousand acres of the best wheat land in Nebraska. At the Bronx Loan and Trust company in New York I have securities to a considerable amount—I am perfectly willing that any one who is at all interested should inquire of the trust company officers as to my standing with them. If I were asked to state my occupation, I should have to say that I am a cattle herder—what you call a cowboy. I can make my living in the practice of the business almost anywhere from New Mexico north to the Canadian line. I flatter myself that I am pretty good at it," and John Armitage smiled and took a cigarette from a box on the table and lighted it.

Dick Claiborne was greatly interested in what Armitage had said, and he struggled between an inclination to encourage further confidence and a feeling that he should, for Shirley's sake, make it clear to this young stranger that it was of no consequence to any member of the Claiborne family who he was or what might be the extent of his lands or the unimpeachable character of his investments. But it was not so easy to turn aside a fellow who was so big of frame and apparently so sane and so steady of purpose as this Armitage. And there was, too, the further consideration that while Armitage was volunteering gratuitous information and assuming an interest in his affairs by the Claibornes that was wholly unjustified, there was also the other side of the matter: that his explanations proceeded from motives of delicacy that were praiseworthy. Dick was puzzled and piqued besides to find that his resources as a big protecting brother were so soon exhausted. What Armitage was asking was the right to seek his sister Shirley's hand in marriage, and the thing was absurd. Moreover, who was John Armitage?

The question started Claiborne into a realization of the fact that Armitage had volunteered considerable information without at all answering this question. Dick Claiborne was a human being and curious.

"Pardon me," he asked, "but are you an Englishman?"

"I am not," answered Armitage. "I have been so long in America that I feel as much at home there as anywhere—but I am neither English nor American by birth. I am, on the other hand—"

He hesitated for the barest second, and Claiborne was sensible of an intensification of interest. Now at last there was to be a revelation that amounted to something.

"On the other hand," Armitage repeated, "I was born at Fontainebleau, where my parents lived for only a few months, but I do not consider that that fact makes me a Frenchman. My mother is dead. My father died—very recently. I have been in America enough to know that a foreigner is often under suspicion—particularly if he have a title. My distinction is that I am a foreigner without one!" John

Armitage looked.

"It is, indeed, a real merit," declared Dick, who felt something was expected of him. In spite of himself he found much to like in John Armitage. He particularly despised sham and pretense, and he had been won by the evident sincerity of Armitage's wish to appear well in his eyes.

"And now," said Armitage, "I assure you that I am not in the habit of talking so much about myself—and if you will overlook this offense I promise not to bore you again."

"I have been interested," remarked Dick. "And," he added, "I cannot do less than thank you, Mr. Armitage."

Armitage began talking of the American army—its strength and weaknesses—with an intimate knowledge that greatly surprised and interested the young officer, and when they separated presently it was with a curious mixture of liking and mystification that Claiborne reviewed their talk.

The next day brought heavy weather, and only hardened seagoers were abroad. Armitage, breakfasting late, was not satisfied that he had acted wisely in speaking to Captain Claiborne; but he had, at any rate, eased in some degree his own conscience, and he had every intention of seeing all that he could of Shirley Claiborne during these days of their fellow voyaging.

(Continued next Saturday.)

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THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Text of the Lesson, I Sam. xx. 30-42. Memory Verse, 42—Golden Text, Prov. xvii, 17—Commentary Prepared by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

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At the beginning of last week's lesson we referred briefly to the love of Jonathan and David as set forth in xviii. 1-4, and now we follow on to consider the love of God and of Jonathan and the murderous hatred of Saul. The great murderer is ever seeking to kill, but the great and only life giver is not only ever giving life, and life abundantly, but He is ever preserving and caring for the life which He gives. When Saul instructed Jonathan and all his servants to kill David, Jonathan so reasoned and pleaded that his father said, "As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain" (xix. 1-6). But no reliance can be placed on a man possessed by such an evil spirit, and soon we read that Saul sought to smite David to the wall with his javelin and then sent messengers to slay him in his own house, but David escaped and went to Samuel, and he and Samuel went to dwell at Natioth (xix. 7-24). From thence David returned to interview Jonathan and said to him, "Truly, as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death" (xx. 3), for so it seemed as long as he was within reach of Saul. Jonathan could not believe this of his father, so they fell upon a plan to ascertain truly the purpose of Saul toward David. When, shortly after this, Saul attempted to kill Jonathan also because he took David's part, then Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David, and he communicated the same to David by means of the lad and the arrows as recorded in chapter xx. 30-42, our special lesson for today. One cannot but think of the purpose of the Jews to kill Jesus and of how He escaped out of their hand again and again until in the eternal purpose of God the time came when they were permitted to do that which His hand and counsel had resolved before to be done (Acts iv. 28).

The death of David at the hands of Saul was not in the plan and purpose of God, however much it may have seemed so at times. We may not know always just what His purpose for us is, but He will make it plain, and we may be quite sure that if we are abiding in Him nothing that is not in His plan for us can ever reach us and all that is in His plan surely will. We may learn to live in God and find in Him always a home of peace and rest. This is our privilege, though few seem to attain to it. See the heart of Jonathan in verse 34. He did not care for himself nor grieve because of his father's treatment of him, but "he was grieved for David because his father had done him shame." Saul's treatment of his son was also his treatment of David, for Jonathan stood for David. When Paul sent Onesimus home to his former master, Philemon, he said in his letter, "Receive him as myself, and if he oweeth thee ought put it to my account." So the Lord Jesus makes us one with Himself, and whoever or whatever touches one of His touches Himself. Therefore He said to Saul when persecuting the Christians, "Why persecutest thou Me?" He said concerning Israel in Zech. ii. 8, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

See the love of Jonathan and David in their parting after the lad had returned home (verse 4). "They kissed one another and wept one with another till David exceeded." Joseph thus wept not only over Benjamin, but over all his brethren as he forgave them and took them to his heart to love them and care for them and nourish them and their little ones. Does Jesus love us thus? For we think that we could trust and rest in love like that. Listen to His own word, "As the Father hath loved Me so have I loved you; continue ye in My love" (John xv. 9). How slow we are to believe it! The wondrous love of these two, David and Jonathan, is seen on a later occasion when Jonathan went to David and strengthened his hand in God and said to him, "Fear not, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee" (chapter xxiii, 16, 17). There seems to be not a particle of self in Jonathan, his desire being all for David and his welfare.

But what shall we say concerning the love of the Son of God to us, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might become rich? (II Cor. viii. 9). He laid aside all His glory which He had with the Father before the world was and became one of us, taking our nature and, greater than all, taking our sins and suffering for them in our stead, that we might in due time be lifted up to His place and share His kingdom and glory. How can we refrain from telling it and living to make it known to those who never heard? As we live it and tell it we are somewhat like Jonathan's lad—we know not anything as to what we are accomplishing (verse 39), but the Lord knows, and He has assured us that His word will never return to Him void, and He will watch over it to perform it (Isa. lv, 11; Jer. i, 12, R. V.). It is safe for us to obey and trust Him to work out His own good purpose. "Willing and obedient" (Isa. i, 19) should be our motto.



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