

Aquinas Learning Read-Aloud Booklet

CAPTAIN MOLLY PITCHER

THE British had left Philadelphia, and were in full retreat across Jersey on their way to New York. Washington was right behind them, the front ranks of the American Army fighting the rear ranks of the British. It was a long, running fight. At last they came to Monmouth, and there a [182] battle was begun. General Charles Lee, in charge of the American forces, acted so badly that the issue of the fight was long in doubt.

When Washington saw the disorder of the troops, he was angry, and rebuked General Lee so harshly that the officer turned as white as a sheet. He was afterwards tried by court-martial and dismissed.

Then Washington took charge himself. Orders flew thick and fast. Aids scurried in every direction, putting cannon in position, and getting ready for the renewed attack which was sure to come. Soon the guns roared, the heat of battle became terrible, and smoke covered the entire field; the dust and dirt were blinding. The men were suffering for lack of water. It was then that Molly Pitcher, the wife of one of the gunners, called out, "Go on with the firing. I will fetch water from the spring."

The men waved their hands to her; she ran down the hill, drew water in a canteen, and carried it back and forth to the soldiers. She passed from cannon to cannon, while the men drank and kept on with their deadly work.

How many times she did this no one knew, but, as she was coming once with her supply of water, a shot from the enemy struck her husband in the [183] breast, and he fell beside his smoking cannon. Molly ran to him, and knelt down by him; one look was enough to convince her that he was dead.

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As she sat there in speechless grief, with the dead man's head in her lap, an officer rode up, and said to some soldiers, "Take this cannon to the rear; there is now no one to serve it."

When Molly heard this, she sprang to her feet, and cried out, "Stop! That cannon shall not leave this field for lack of some one to serve it. Since they have killed my poor husband, I will take his place, and avenge his death."

With that, she seized the rammer from the hands of her dead husband, sprang to the muzzle of the piece, rammed home the powder, and stepped back, saying, "Ready!" Then the cannon blazed again, carrying death and dismay to the ranks of the enemy.

Molly Pitcher stood at her post as long as the battle lasted. Black with smoke, covered with dirt and dust, blinded by the heat, she did the work of a man. She never flinched for a moment, nor did she stop until the order came to cease firing.

Then she sat down on the ground by the side of her poor dead husband, took his head again in her lap, and gave way to her tears and grief.

[184] Washington had seen her with her cannon during the battle. He admired her courage and patriotism, and sent for her to come to headquarters. He told her what a splendid deed of heroism she had done, and conferred on her an officer's commission. After that, she wore an epaulet, and everybody called her "Captain Molly."

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OUTWITTING A TORY

DURING the Revolution, the soldiers of Sumter and Marion in the South were very annoying to the British Commanders. The most notorious of these Commanders was Colonel Tarleton, and many are the stories of his cruelty. He was active in plundering and burning the homes of the sturdy Patriots'. Tarleton liked nothing better than to destroy the fields and harry the family of some patriot soldier who happened to be away with Marion or Sumter.

Not all the inhabitants of the country were Patriots. Some still adhered to the British cause. These were bitterly hated by their neighbors, and were called Tories.

During one of the raids of Colonel Tarleton, a [189] young Scotchman, named MacDonald, one of Marion's soldiers decided to play a trick upon a man living in his neighborhood, whom he suspected of being a Tory. As soon as MacDonald heard that Tarleton was near by, he put on a British uniform, and, early one morning, calling at the house of the man, said to him:

"The compliments, sir, of Colonel Tarleton, who sends you his respects as being one of the friends of the King."

"Come in! come in!" cried the Tory, much delighted to have a visit from a British officer. "You say that Colonel Tarleton sends me his compliments, and knows that I am a friend of the King? Why, indeed, I am, and am ready to show it at any time. Tell the Colonel so."

"That I will," replied MacDonald. "But Colonel Tarleton is already in need of your aid, and desires me to beg of you one of

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your fine horses for him to ride. He will use it in driving these rebels out of the country."

"One of my horses!" cried the old Tory. "That I will, gladly. He shall have the best in my pasture. I shall get him at once. I am honored to furnish the Colonel with a horse!"

Whereupon the Tory called his negro servant, and gave orders that the best horse in his stable [190] should be brought out and made ready for the British officer to take away with him. While the servant was gone, the Tory brought out rich food and wine, and spread it before MacDonald, who did not hesitate to eat and drink to his heart's content.

When the horse arrived, a beautiful young animal, the sly old Tory said,

"Now, you tell the Colonel I send this with my compliments, and, if I find he can ever do me a favor, I shall come to ask him."

"That I shall, the very next time I see him," said MacDonald, and rode away on the full-blooded steed. But, instead of going to the headquarters of the British Army, MacDonald rode off to the swamps, where Marion and his men were in hiding. Here he told them how he had fooled the old Tory. They laughed a long time over the story.

"Of course we could have taken the horse anyhow, but I wanted to be sure he was a Tory, and then, I enjoy a joke. I would like to hear what he will have to say when he finds out his mistake," declared MacDonald to his companions.

The next morning the old Tory went to see Colonel Tarleton, and presented himself with a smiling face. Tarleton received him coldly, and inquired his business.

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[191] "How do you like the horse I sent you yesterday?" asked the smiling Tory.

"What horse?" demanded Tarleton. "No one sent me a horse yesterday or any other day."

"Why, a British officer came to my house, and said you sent him for one of my fine horses; I gave it to him, with a saddle and blanket, a pair of silver mounted pistols, and a rain coat; and he had, heavens knows how much, food and drink," cried the bewildered Tory.

"Somebody has been fooling you, old man. I have not seen or heard of your horse," said Tarleton, turning away.

The Tory now realized the trick that had been played upon him. He swore roundly that he would get even with those rascally rebels, if it took him the rest of his life. He then went home in a great rage; but he never saw his fine horse again.

As for MacDonald and his new friend, they became inseparable. It was a beautiful horse, sixteen hands high, with the eyes of an eagle, and a proud spirit in his veins. The road was never too long for him, and the run never too swift. He learned his master's voice and whistle, and, when he heard the call, he came like the wind, bearing him swiftly into battle, or safely beyond the reach of his enemies.