

**THE FIRST CAPTURE;
OR, HAULING DOWN
THE FLAG OF ENGLAND**

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The first capture; or, Hauling down the flag of England by Harry Castlemon

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Hauling Down the Flag of England

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON

*Author of "The Gunboat Series," "Houseboat Series,"
"War Series," Etc., Etc.*

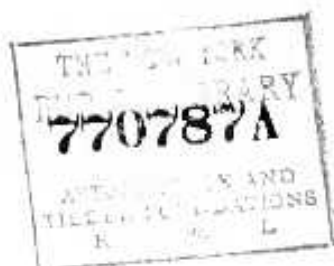


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THE FIRST CAPTURE

CHAPTER I.

THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON.

It happened on the morning of the 9th day of May. The little village of Machias in the far away colony of Maine was lively enough as far as fishing towns go, but on this particular time it was in a regular turmoil. Men had jumped up leaving their breakfast half eaten and ran out bare-headed to gather round a courier, who, sitting on a horse that had his head down and his flanks heaving as if he were almost exhausted, was telling them of a fight which had occurred just twenty days before. There was nothing to indicate that the men were excited except their pale faces and clenched hands, but the looks they turned upon one another had a volume of meaning in them. What had

the messenger to communicate that had incited such a feeling among those who listened to him? He was describing the battle of Lexington which had been fought and won by the patriots on the 19th day of April. We did not have any telegraph in those days, and the only way the people could hold communication with one another was by messengers, mounted on fleet horses, who rode from village to village with the news.

The courier was so impatient to tell what he knew that he could not talk fast enough, but the substance of his story was as follows :

General Gage, the commander of the British troops who were quartered in Boston about this time, had become a tyrant in the eyes of the people. When spring opened he had a force of three thousand five hundred men. Boston was the headquarters of the rebellion. He determined with this force to nip the insurrection in the bud, and his first move was to seize and destroy the stores of the patriots at Concord, a little village located about six miles from Lexington. To carry out this plan he sent forth eight hundred men under the command of Colonel Smith and Major Pitcairn with orders to "seize, burn and otherwise render useless" everything in the shape of munitions of war that they could find. He supposed he went about it secretly, but the ever-vigilant patriots were awake to all his movements. A watch was established at Concord, and everywhere the minute-

men were ready with "burnished muskets, fixed bayonets, and well-filled cartouches."

They left Boston about midnight, but it so happened that the minute-men became aware of their expedition almost as soon as it was ready to start. Paul Revere was there and ready to undertake his famous midnight ride. No sooner was the trampling of soldiers heard than two lights were hung in the steeple of Christ Church in Charlestown. Paul Revere saw the lights, and he forthwith mounted his horse and started to carry the warning to every village in Middlesex.* The British did not see the beacon fire blazing above them, but marched away silent and still, arresting everybody that came in their way "to prevent the intelligence of their expedition being given."

As the day began to dawn in the east the British reached Lexington, and there they found a company of minute-men gathered on the green. To say that they

* "He said to a friend, 'If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the Old North Tower as a signal light—
One if by land, two if by sea,
And I on the opposite shore will be
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm
For the country folk to be up and to arm.'"

were amazed at the sight would be putting it very mildly ; but Major Pitcairn, after a short consultation with his superior officer, rode up and flourished his sword as if he meant to annihilate the minute-men then and there. His officers followed him and his troops came close behind him in double quick time. But the patriots stood their ground, and the redcoats shouted angrily at them—

“Disperse, you villains ! Lay down your arms ! Why don't you disperse, you rebels ?”

But our men had not come out there to be dispersed by shouting. Utterly ignorant of the ways of civilized warfare they continued to hold their ground, and for a time it looked as though there was going to be bloodshed sure enough. Major Pitcairn did not care to come too close to them but wheeled his horse, discharged his pistol and shouted “Fire !” and the British obeyed him. The front rank fired, and when the smoke cleared away, seven men, the first martyrs of the Revolution, were found weltering in their blood. That was too much for the patriots. They did not suppose that the British were going to