

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Author has often been asked if there were any foundation in real life for the delineation of the principal character in this book. He can give no clearer answer to the question than by laying before his readers a simple statement of the facts connected with its original publication.

Many years since, the writer of this volume was at the residence of an illustrious man, who had been employed in various situations of high trust during the darkest days of the American Revolution. The discourse turned upon the effects which great political excitement produces on character, and the purifying consequences of a love of country, when that sentiment is powerfully and generally awakened in a people. He who, from his years, his services, and his knowledge of men, was best qualified to take the lead in such a conversation, was the principal speaker. After dwelling on the marked manner in which the great struggle of the nation, during the war of 1775, had given a new and honorable direction to the thoughts and practices of multitudes whose time had formerly been engrossed by the most vulgar concerns of life, he illustrated his opinions by relating an anecdote, the truth of which he could attest as a personal witness.

The dispute between England and the United States of America, though not strictly a family quarrel, had many of the features of a civil war. The people of the latter were never properly and constitutionally subject to the people of the former, but the inhabitants of both countries owed allegiance to a common king. The Americans, as a nation, disavowed this allegiance, and the English choosing to support their sovereign in the attempt to regain his power, most of the feelings of an internal struggle were involved in the conflict. A large proportion of the emigrants from Europe, then established in the colonies, took part with the crown; and there were many districts in which their influence, united to that of the Americans who refused to lay aside their allegiance, gave a decided preponderance to the royal cause. America was then too young, and too much in need of every heart and hand, to regard these partial divisions, small as they were in actual amount, with indifference. The evil was

greatly increased by the activity of the English in profiting by these internal dissensions; and it became doubly serious when it was found that attempts were made to raise various corps of provincial troops, who were to be banded with those from Europe, to reduce the young republic to subjection. Congress named an especial and a secret committee, therefore, for the express purpose of defeating this object. Of this committee Mr.—, the narrator of the anecdote, was chairman.

In the discharge of the novel duties which now devolved on him, Mr.— had occasion to employ an agent whose services differed but little from those of a common spy. This man, as will easily be understood, belonged to a condition in life which rendered him the least reluctant to appear in so equivocal a character. He was poor, ignorant, so far as the usual instruction was concerned; but cool, shrewd, and fearless by nature. It was his office to learn in what part of the country the agents of the crown were making their efforts to embody men, to repair to the place, enlist, appear zealous in the cause he affected to serve, and otherwise to get possession of as many of the secrets of the enemy as possible. The last he of course communicated to his employers, who took all the means in their power to counteract the plans of the English, and frequently with success.

It will readily be conceived that a service like this was attended with great personal hazard. In addition to the danger of discovery, there was the daily risk of falling into the hands of the Americans themselves, who invariably visited sins of this nature more severely on the natives of the country than on the Europeans who fell into their hands. In fact, the agent of Mr.— was several times arrested by the local authorities; and, in one instance, he was actually condemned by his exasperated countrymen to the gallows. Speedy and private orders to the jailer alone saved him from an ignominious death. He was permitted to escape; and this seeming and indeed actual peril was of great aid in supporting his assumed character among the English. By the Americans, in his little sphere, he was denounced as a bold and inveterate Tory. In this manner he continued to serve his country in secret during the early years of the struggle, hourly environed by danger, and the constant subject of unmerited opprobrium.

In the year—, Mr.— was named to a high and honorable employment at a European court. Before vacating his seat in

Congress, he reported to that body an outline of the circumstances related, necessarily suppressing the name of his agent, and demanding an appropriation in behalf of a man who had been of so much use, at so great risk. A suitable sum was voted; and its delivery was confided to the chairman of the secret committee.

Mr.— took the necessary means to summon his agent to a personal interview. They met in a wood at midnight. Here Mr.— complimented his companion on his fidelity and adroitness; explained the necessity of their communications being closed; and finally tendered the money. The other drew back, and declined receiving it. "The country has need of all its means," he said; "as for myself, I can work, or gain a livelihood in various ways." Persuasion was useless, for patriotism was uppermost in the heart of this remarkable individual; and Mr.— departed, bearing with him the gold he had brought, and a deep respect for the man who had so long hazarded his life, unrequited, for the cause they served in common.

The writer is under an impression that, at a later day, the agent of Mr.— consented to receive a remuneration for what he had done; but it was not until his country was entirely in a condition to bestow it.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that an anecdote like this, simply but forcibly told by one of its principal actors, made a deep impression on all who heard it. Many years later, circumstances, which it is unnecessary to relate, and of an entirely adventitious nature, induced the writer to publish a novel, which proved to be, what he little foresaw at the time, the first of a tolerably long series. The same adventitious causes which gave birth to the book determined its scene and its general character. The former was laid in a foreign country; and the latter embraced a crude effort to describe foreign manners. When this tale was published, it became matter of reproach among the author's friends, that he, an American in heart as in birth, should give to the world a work which aided perhaps, in some slight degree, to feed the imaginations of the young and unpracticed among his own countrymen, by pictures drawn from a state of society so different from that to which he belonged. The writer, while he knew how much of what he had done was purely accidental, felt the reproach to be one that, in a measure, was just. As the only