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David Periton's Ride

## DANIEL PERITON'S RIDE.

BY ALBION W. TOURGÉE.

ALL day long the river flowed,  
Down by the winding mountain road,  
Leaping and roaring in angry mood.  
At stubborn rocks in its way that stood;  
Sullen the gleam of its rippled crest,  
Dark was the foam on its yellow breast;  
The dripping banks on either side  
But half imprisoned the turgid tide.  
By farm and village it quickly sped—  
The weeping skies bent low overhead—  
Foaming and rushing and tumbling down  
Into the streets of pent Johnstown—  
Down through the valley of Conemaugh,  
Down from the dam of shale and straw,  
To the granite bridge, where its waters pour,  
Through the arches wide, with a dismal roar.

All day long the pitiful tide,  
Babbled of death on the mountain side;  
And all day long with jest and sigh,  
They who were doomed that day to die,  
Turned deafened ears to the warning roar  
They had heard so oft and despised before.

Yet women trembled—the mother's eyes  
Turned oft to the lowering, woful skies—  
And shuddered to think what might befall  
Should the flood burst over the earthen wall.  
So all day long they went up and down,  
Heedless of peril in doomed Johnstown.

And all day long in the chilly gloom  
Of a thrifty merchant's counting-room,  
O'er the ledger bent with anxious care,  
Old Periton's only son and heir—  
A commonplace, plodding, industrious youth,  
Counting debit and credit the highest truth,  
And profit and loss a more honored game  
Than searching for laurels or fighting for fame.  
He saw the dark tide as it swept by the door,  
But heeded it not till his task was o'er;  
Then saddled his horse—a black-pointed bay,  
High-stepping, high-blooded—grandson of Dismay—  
Raw-boned and deep-chested—his eyes full of fire—  
The temper of Satan—Magog was his sire—  
Arched fetlocks, strong quarters, low knees,  
And lean, bony head—his dam gave him these—  
The foal of a racer transformed to a cob  
For the son of the merchant when out of a job.  
"Now I'll see," said Dan Periton mounting the bay,  
"What danger there is of the dam giving way!"

A marvelous sight young Periton saw  
When he rode up the valley of Conemaugh.  
Seventy feet the water fell  
With a roar like the angry ocean's swell!  
Seventy feet from the crumbling crest  
To the rock on which the foundations rest!  
Seventy feet fell the ceaseless flow  
Into the boiling gulf below!  
Dan Periton's cheek grew pale with fear,  
As the echoes fell on his startled ear,  
And he thought of the weight of the pent-up tide,  
That hung on the rifted mountain-side,  
Held by that heap of stone and straw  
O'er the swarming valley of Conemaugh!  
The raw-boned bay with quivering ears  
Displayed a brute's instinctive fears,  
Snorted and pawed with flashing eye,  
Seized on the curb, and turned to fly!

Dan Periton tightened his grip on the rein,  
Sat close to the saddle, glanced backward again,  
Touched the bay with the spur, then gave him his head,  
And down the steep valley they clattering sped.  
Then the horse showed his breeding—the close gripping  
knees

Felt the strong shoulders working with unflagging ease—  
As mile after mile, 'neath the high-blooded bay,  
The steep mountain turnpike flew backward away,  
While with outstretched neck he went galloping down  
With the message of warning to periled Johnstown,  
Past farmhouse and village, while shrilly outrang  
O'er the river's deep roar and the hoot's iron clang,  
His gallant young rider's premonitory shout,  
"Fly! Fly to the hills! The waters are out!"

Past Mineral Point there came such a roar  
As never had shaken those mountains before!  
Dan urged the good horse then with word and caress:  
'Twould be his last race, what mattered distress?  
A mile farther on and behind him he spied  
The wreck-laden crest of the death-dealing tide!  
Then he plied whip and spur and redoubled the shout,  
"To the hills! To the hills! The waters are out!"  
Thus horseman and flood-tide came racing it down,  
The cinder-paved streets of doomed Johnstown!

Daniel Periton knew that his doom was nigh,  
Yet never once faltered his clarion cry;  
The blood ran off from his good steed's side;  
Over him hung the white crest of the tide;  
His hair felt the touch of the eygre's breath;  
The spray on his cheek was the cold kiss of death;  
Beneath him the horse 'gan to tremble and droop—  
He saw the pale rider who sat on the croup—  
But clear over all rang his last warning shout,  
"To the hills! To the hills! For the waters are out!"  
Then the tide reared its head and leaped vengefully down  
On the horse and his rider in fated Johnstown!

That horse was a hero, so poets still say,  
That brought the good news of the treaty to Aix,  
And the steed is immortal, which carried Bevers  
Through the echoing night with his message of fear,  
And the one that bore Sheridan into the fray,  
From Winchester town, "twenty miles away";  
But none of these merits a nobler lay  
Than young Daniel Periton's raw-boned bay  
That raced down the valley of Conemaugh,  
With the tide that rushed through the dam of straw.

Boaring and rushing and tearing down  
On the fated thousands in doomed Johnstown!  
In the very track of the eygre's swoop,  
With Dan in the saddle and Death on the croup,  
The foam of his nostrils flew back on the wind,  
And mixed with the foam of the billow behind.

A terrible vision the morrow saw  
In the desolate valley of Conemaugh!  
The river had shrunk to its narrow bed,  
But its way was choked with the heaped-up dead.  
'Gainst the granite bridge with its arches four  
Lay the wreck of a city that delves no more,  
And under it all, so the searchers say,  
Stood the sprawling limbs of the gallant bay,  
Stiff-cased in the drift of the Conemaugh.  
A goodlier statue man never saw—  
Dan's foot in the stirrup, his hand on the rein!  
So shall they live in white marble again;  
And ages shall tell, as they gaze on the group,  
Of the race that he saw while Death sat on the croup.

MAYVILLE, N. Y. *Conemaugh*